

Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures

WRITINGS ON LOVE
IN THE
ENGLISH MIDDLE AGES



Edited by Helen Cooney



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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Carol Meale was Reader in Medieval Studies at the University of Bristol and where she is currently Senior Research Fellow. She is the editor of *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991); and coeditor of *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991) and *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain—Essays for Felicity Riddy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). Amongst her many publications are articles on Chaucer, medieval romance, book production and reception (codices and early printed books), and medieval women's patronage and reading.

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Bernard O'Donoghue teaches Medieval English at Wadham College, Oxford. He writes on medieval and twentieth-century poetry, and his publications include *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1982), an anthology of medieval European love-writings in parallel text. He has also written *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (New York, London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994), as well as five volumes of original poems. He is currently translating *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for Penguin Classics.

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John Scattergood was educated at the University of Birmingham at King's College, London. From 1964 to 1980, he was a member of the Department of English at the University of Bristol: he was made Reader in Medieval English in 1978. Since 1980, he has been Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Trinity College, Dublin, and was made a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin in 1981. He has written extensively on English literature from the Anglo-Saxon period to the early seventeenth century. His books include *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford, 1971), *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), and *The Lost Tradition: Essays on Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). He has edited *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1975), and *The English Poems of John Skelton* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983). He has edited four collection of essays: *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), with James Sherborne, *Literature and Learning in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1984), *Texts and Their Contexts: Papers from the Early Book Society* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), with Julia Boffey, and, *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Language and Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), with Helen Conrad O'Brien and Anne-Marie

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INTRODUCTION

Helen Cooney

*And for ther is so gret diversite
In English and in writinge of oure tonge . . .*

Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1793–4

This volume seeks to reflect the “gret diversite” of writings on love in the English Middle Ages. It focuses mainly on those writings which were produced in the English language, but also makes significant reference to Anglo-Norman writing, in particular to its influence on English writers on love and their readers, and to the work of those Scottish poets such as Dunbar and Gavin Douglas who themselves professed to write in “Englisshe,” as distinct from the Scots-Gallic tradition. Due recognition and considerable reference is however made to the international background, chiefly to the influence of the courtly ethos of *fin amor* as expressed either through continental lyric and romance or as encapsulated in Andreas Capellanus’s scholastic treatise, the *De Amore*, as well as in the *Roman de la Rose*. This book seeks not to impose a single “grand récit” on the body of texts under discussion, and to have not a unitary but rather a multifaceted perspective. It is hoped that the wide range of genres addressed and the vastly differing perspectives on love which seem to have been held by the medieval writers of lyric, romance, allegory, and so on, and by a whole range of writers, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, are given expression in all their diversity. As a reflection of this diversity, the kind of scholarly approach adopted by the contributors is likewise various: there are essays which deal with issues of culture, gender, “the politics of desire” and textual and social practice in England, as well as more traditional literary methodologies, such as intertextuality, source-study, and comparative treatments of male- and female-centered texts. Three of the essays deal with the works of Chaucer, but several more make significant reference to

him—something which reflects the sheer importance of his work for audiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The essays which deal with Chaucer's love-poetry itself are also significantly diverse, but it is hoped that all lead to new—and radical—readings of very familiar texts.



In the course of describing the dance of love in the Jardin de Deduiz in the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris made the following remark about the garment of Cupid: it was “faites / par fines amorietes.” (877–8).¹ The text here, as so often, is utterly polysemous, yet given that *textus* means primarily “woven [thing],” and given also the currency of the textile/textual analogy in medieval culture, it seems to me that one possible interpretation of Guillaume's remark is that the *Roman's* literary account of the nature of Cupid and, by extension, the emotions and activities of his servants (i.e., the entire *textus*), have actually been created by (“par”) courtly (“fines”) lovers themselves.² This remark is hugely significant in what it tells us about the extent to which the phenomenon known as *fin amor* was a purely textual and/or social construct. At the very least, it suggests a very strong element of contingency and subjectivity—or even, in its strictest sense, of “self-fashioning”—in the literature of courtly love.

This volume of essays, while it is (intentionally) without a central thesis, does however explore, in a significant subtext, the extent to which the writings about love addressed here are self-fashioned and essentially subjective, or are determined by objective, external factors such as the social class or the broad cultural milieu and historical circumstances of the writer. The work of Chaucer seems to give the lie utterly to the view that the medieval writer on love is bound by his or her subjectivity or circumstances, gendered, social or otherwise. Ironically, it was most likely the *Roman de la Rose* itself (most notably, Jean de Meun's continuation of it) which suggested to Chaucer the possibility that a single author might give voice to a whole range of perspectives on love and life in general. Indeed, Barry Windeatt's essay here makes the case that even the apparently monolithic *Troilus and Criseyde* is host to a wide variety of perspectives on love. On the other hand, John Scattergood's analysis of the socially nuanced dialogues of the second book of Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, as well as a range of texts including the *Roman de la Rose* itself, makes a powerful case for the fact that the literary lover's nature and identity was in large part governed by the social realities and hierarchies of the medieval world. Looking at a different text again, however, Carol Meale demonstrates how a male-authored English translation of Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* actually

works toward “the assertion of *female* subjectivity.” In this instance, it would seem that writing on love need not be determined even by the gender of the author. But to shift the ground once more, my own essay here seeks to show that *The Floure and the Leafe*, like much fifteenth-century courtly literature, represents a response to a specific set of social and historical circumstances and a crisis which was occurring that time, in the aristocratic milieu in England.

Even this brief sampling would suggest that while, on the one hand, writings on love were indeed (as Guillaume had suggested) created by lovers in their own image and hence were highly subjective in nature, it would appear that, on the other hand, texts were often influenced, if not actually determined, by external social and historical realities and duly reflect these objective forces. The single instance which best captures the range of possibilities on this subjective/objective, or performative/descriptive continuum is the imaginative ventriloquism of Andreas in the *De Amore*, the celibate male cleric who could accurately give voice to the social and amatory imperatives faced for example by the courtly heroine and the male peasant lover alike.



It is appropriate that a volume which seeks to privilege diversity of approach should contain, from the beginning, an internal dialectic. Hence, in the opening essay, Bernard O'Donoghue proposes to reassert mid-twentieth century views according to which ideas of *fin amor*, initiated by the southern French lyric poets in the twelfth century and duly “translated” into romance form at around that time, are the best context for a reading of medieval English love-poetry. He thus implicitly challenges the insistence of John Burrow in his magisterial *Ricardian Poetry* on the lack of an established literary tradition in the middle of the fourteenth century, seeking to show instead that continental works embodying the ethos of *amour par amour* were of profound significance to medieval authors working in the courtly tradition. In making this case, he sees medieval English writers on love as sharing the Lacanian definition of love as “an individual inclination that worked against the interests of society.” The focus in the essay is on Middle English lyrics in the context of the European background. However, in her essay, Helen Cooper proposes a radically different view—namely, that the ideal of *fin amor*, and with it, Petrarchan conventions, had no relevance in writing on love in England at least until the writing of *Troilus and Criseyde*. In her study of Anglo-Norman romances, she demonstrates that, in texts of this kind, women had an enhanced role, and she shows clearly how features which were anathema to the *fin amor* and

Petrarchan ethos—most especially reciprocal passion and resulting marriage, as well as the fact that the romance heroines often become pregnant on their wedding-night—were in fact commonplace in the Anglo-Norman romances. She argues that this ethos of love has been lost sight of primarily because of the dominance in the modern readers' mind of works such as *Troilus* and the *Knight's Tale*. Corinne Saunders shares Cooper's rebuttal of the importance of the *fin amor* tradition on English writing, this time focussing on the native tradition of Middle English romances. Comparing these texts with Latin and French antecedents and analogues, she does see evidence of "engagement" with these texts but at the same time finds a sharp contrast and deliberate "rewriting" of the (continental) treatment of love as a courtly game into the English concept of love as a virtue, characterised particularly by qualities of "trouthe." The three opening essays thus constitute a mini-"débat" concerning the significance—or otherwise—of the (male-authored and originally continental) ethos of courtly love in medieval English writings on love. Moreover, while for Bernard O'Donoghue, in the volume's first essay, Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore* was taken to encapsulate the continental ideal of *fin amor* and was discussed insofar as this ideal/ethos may have had an influence on medieval English writings on love, John Scattergood's essay treats Andreas's treatise of love in a far more sociohistorical and empirical way. It takes up the *De Amore*'s rhetorical concern with social class and, beginning with a detailed discussion of the often-neglected series of dialogues between lovers of varying "degree" in the lengthy second book of the treatise, extrapolates from these dialogues the very real constraints of social hierarchy on the medieval lover, firstly as expressed in the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose*, but ultimately in the English pastourelles of Dunbar and some "native" English romances, including the *Squire of Lowe Degree*.

There follows a group of essays on the love-poetry of Chaucer, and in these one finds a focus not alone on diversity, but also on divergences of points of view on love, even within a single text. This is emphatically the case with the essay of Barry Windeatt, which challenges the preoccupation, not only of critics, but most importantly, of the poem itself, with establishing a monolithic/single "definition" of love—founded most often on intertextual ironies—in order to unify the poem. Windeatt argues that in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Boccaccio's *Filosatrato* has been "rescripted" in order to allow for repeated discussion and definition of love, and that it is in fact an implicitly humanist narrative, by virtue of its experimental and open-ended nature.

Throughout the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*—and consequently and inevitably, in literary-critical studies of the texts—it is the corporeality of Alisoun and her desires that have been emphasised, and her genesis in literature has most often been found in Jean de Meun's embittered, old

La Vieille, a former promiscuous woman, who used her body to fulfil her material desires. Alastair Minnis attempts a radical reappraisal of Alisoun of Bath as an *auctrice* or female authority-figure, skilled in academic disputation. He argues that this remarkable transformation from her literary models and precedents is achieved by Chaucer's manipulation of narrative point-of-view and voice—thereby placing traditional misogynistic materials in a problematizing perspective in such a way that one may find in the discourse of an old woman “wisdom and usage.” The *Franklin's Tale* has been tried and tested in relation to myriad contexts: Neil Cartlidge is perhaps the first critic to bring it into conjunction with late-medieval legal materials. He finds the tale “remarkably legalistic,” dealing with issues such as the wife's liability within a marriage or the definition of a contract, and argues that legal and scholastic genres such as the *quaestio disputanda*, are the correct context in which to view the tale, as distinct from traditional contextualizations of it in relation to, for example, the literary *demande d'amour*.

The focus then shifts almost entirely to fifteenth-century writings on love. Taking up once again the idea of differentiation between male- and female-authored texts, Martha Driver compares the treatments by Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan of a common stock of materials on various types of love from the sacred to the profane, as found in the seminal *Roman de la Rose*. She concludes—using the example of La Vieille as she is reconstituted in Chaucer's Wife of Bath, on the one hand, and in Christine's advice to women in her *Book of the Three Virtues* on the other—that Chaucer is “an advocate” of the *Rose*, Christine, “a critic,” while noting the important qualification of this in Chaucer's *Melibee*. The overarching purpose of the essay is however to show how the *Roman* was rewritten (“romanced”) for a late-medieval audience. Carol Meale's essay is more overtly gender-based and poses a trenchant challenge to the dominance of male-centered texts which focus on male-centered desire, this time, as such an ethos had attained dominance in the works of Chaucer and others in the fourteenth century. Meale shows how the mid-fifteenth century Middle English translation of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* dislocates that text's portrayal of the expression of female desire as somehow transgressive and allows us to feel the female speaker's frustration with the entire courtly discourse, so that a “difficult” woman is created (ironically enough, by a male translator). She echoes the view of Cooper and Saunders to the effect that many of the writers of Anglo-Norman and “native” English romance had indeed created “strong women” as heroines of romance. However, Meale goes further and argues that if these women are indeed active “it is only because their activity is congruent with male desire.” She goes on to continue her search for “intimations of female interiority” and “other examples of female subjectivity” in fifteenth-century courtly poems such as *The Floure and*

the Leafe and *The Assembly of Ladies*, concluding with a brief study of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Helen Cooney's essay on *The Floure and the Leafe* seeks to show that this "little booke" has not only moral, but also philosophical, esthetic and sociohistorical significance, and that the poem comprises a highly self-conscious and finely wrought negotiation of the influence of Chaucer. Finally, Priscilla Bawcutt returns to the question of the "courtly love tradition" and explores the existence (or, as has hitherto been thought, *nonexistence*) of such literature in Scotland, in the fifteenth century. Bawcutt examines a range of genres (principally romance, dream-allegory, and complaint) in which love is treated and the variety of tone and definition in those treatments, which she believes to have been heavily influenced by Chaucer and other English poets. She focuses specifically on the treatment of love in Blind Harry's *Wallace*, Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, and Gavin Douglas's *Eneados* (Prologue to Book IV).

Notes

1. Reference is to *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1965–1970).
2. The phrase "par fines amorietes" is translated by Charles Dahlberg as "by delicate loves," (*The Romance of the Rose* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971]) and by Frances Horgan as "of courtly loves." (*The Romance of the Rose* [Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1992]). Both seem to miss the profoundly self-reflexive nature of this remark about the making of a garment or *textus*. It is essential to note that the text/textile analogy, now favored by modern theorists, is to be found in the work of Patristic authors, notably St Ambrose and St Augustine. For an account of its origins and significance in medieval thought, see Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially pp. 99–142. A translator of the *Roman* into modern French, André Lanly, comes closest to my own interpretation: his translation reads, "... une robe de fleurettes/faite par de tenders "amourettes." (*Le Roman de la Rose* [Paris: Champion, 1971]). This endorses the inference that the robe (i.e., the text) was actually created by personifications of those in Cupid's retinue. As Lanly puts it in his note: "ces 'amourettes' semblent, ici ... les suivantes d'Amour personnifiées comme lui."

CHAPTER 1

THE REALITY OF COURTLY LOVE

Bernard O'Donoghue

Précis: Medieval courtly love writings, far from being an impediment to the understanding of medieval literature, are indispensable for the understanding of Middle English love poetry.

The spirited debates in English about the nature and influence of courtly love—or about what Boase called its meaning and origins¹—which had run periodically from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, seemed to end in inconclusive acrimony. The most recent series peaked in the 1960s and came to a sort of resolution with an opposed set of declarations, an agreement to differ. On one side D.W. Robertson, E.T. Donaldson (who were otherwise rarely on the same side in argument), and J.F. Benton argued that courtly love was a somewhat tendentious modern invention and—in Robertson's much-quoted phrase—"an impediment to the understanding of medieval texts."² Benton too felt impeded: "I have found the term 'courtly love' no advantage in trying to understand the theory and practice of love in medieval Europe. . . . The study of love in the Middle Ages would be far easier if we were not impeded by a term which now inevitably confuses the issue" (37). "Impediment" was also the term used by William Matthews to deplore courtly love.³ Indeed, in the mid-1960s people went to considerable lengths to deny its existence at all, notably J.J. Wilhelm who proposed replacing the term "courtly love poetry" with "Christian secular poetry."⁴ In diametrical contrast, Peter Dronke argued (in his magisterial survey of the European medieval and premedieval lyric)⁵ that courtly love was a major medieval literary phenomenon. Dronke also took issue with C.S. Lewis's familiar view that courtly love originated in eleventh-century Provence, arguing rather that it was a codification of an ageless set of attitudes to love and sexuality. The two sets of views in the 1960s—

Dronke's European view and, for convenience, those of the Americans—are strongly opposed to each other in a simple way: to put it perhaps too simply, Dronke believes that courtly love is conceptually important and psychologically enlightening; its detractors see it as an overcodified nuisance.

Before arguing for an explicit recuperation of courtly love as an essential concept, we should note that this condemnation of it as an impediment is peculiar to the English critical tradition. Active discussion of the concepts and terminology of courtly love survives strongly in French criticism, especially in the hugely influential school of psychoanalytic interpretation founded by Jacques Lacan who himself applies Freudian categories to this medieval tradition, seeing it as influential in all postmedieval ages down to our own. Equally importantly, it is taken as indispensable in the Anglo-American discussion of European literature, in most literary cultures apart from English.⁶ This is partly a consequence of the way in which literary criticism of works in English was developed, and the light in which it saw itself. In turn, this links to the traditions of philosophy in English: the bias since the seventeenth century toward the practical and empirical, as against the theoretical. This is obviously too large and too remote a matter to go generally into in this context; however, it is worth stating because so much of the impatience with courtly love in English has found fault with its abstract, rule-governed nature, as distinct from “real” love. Leo Bersani notes the resistance of Anglo-American critics to Lacan and to “the perennially suspect extravagances of Gallic theorizing.”⁷ A relatively early attack on courtly love along these lines was made by J.S.P. Tatlock, in his essay on *Troilus and Criseyde* in 1941,⁸ when he says “a fundamental modern error has been identifying the expressed romantic love [in the poem] with what is at present habitually called ‘courtly love’ ” (88). Courtly love, he says, is “a rather silly outgrowth” from the “mid-medieval romantic love or any supra-sensual love.” Revealingly, Tatlock twice uses the phrase “medieval romantic love,” clearly believing that there was in the Middle Ages as in other ages a “normal” kind of love, which was not to be confused with the “silly outgrowth” of courtly love. He resists what from a commonsensical modern perspective is abnormal (what Lacan calls “Other”) in early periods. Likewise, criticism of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the same period as the Newman anthology (which was dominated by readings which were sceptical about courtly love) concentrated on its “Ricardian” inclination to move from the conventional toward the real, by contrast with some earlier criticisms that stressed the poem's use of the ideas of *courtoisie*.⁹ In this spirit of skepticism, Benton said courtly love “confuses” the issue (in the passage quoted above); the weakness with his argument is that “the whole matter of love” in the Middle Ages (to borrow Guillaume de Lorris's term)¹⁰ is a hugely complex and confused issue, in

religious, social, and erotic terms. Courtly love can be defined as a systematic account developed to cope with these complexities which are so difficult to understand in modern epistemology.

What I want to argue here then is that, far from being an impediment to understanding medieval texts, familiarity with the terms and assumptions of courtly love is often a corrective prerequisite to understanding medieval love texts at all, including those in Middle English literature. I will end with some brief examples of its application in Middle English in particular. It has been possible to miss this essential prerequisite to understanding because the English writers, drawing on French traditions, were taking this familiarity as given. Often they do not labor their conformity to the terms or situations of *fyn amor*; but we cannot quite see what they are saying without sharing their implicit assumptions. To take a familiar instance of this: when Criseyde says "Who yaf me drynke?" upon seeing Troilus,¹¹ we do not understand how her rhetorical question functions in Chaucer's text if we do not pick up the reference to the love-potion in the story of Tristan and Iseult. Criseyde is saying "I find the sight of Troilus intoxicating"; but the dangerous implication of this intoxication is only appreciated if we remember what the irresistible potion-induced love in *Tristan* led to.

To establish what I mean by courtly love in making this claim, I will give a summary prehistory of it as a term, familiar as this is. This brief reminder is warranted because of the much-repeated claim of its detractors that courtly love was an invention of the late nineteenth century: a curiously disingenuous claim as we will see, given the evidence of Stendhal, Heine, Wagner, and Flaubert. In fact, when Gaston Paris used the term *amour courtois* in 1883 with reference to Chretien's *Lancelot* (1170s), he was popularizing a term with considerable precedent. Jean Frappier noted in 1959 that the troubadour Peire d'Auvergne used the phrase *cortez'amors* in the twelfth century. *Amor cortez* occurs in the thirteenth-century *Roman de Flamenca*; interestingly for the English reader, Elizabeth Donno discovered three occurrences of the phrase itself in Sir John Davies's long Platonic poem about the dance *Orchestra* (1575). All these usages are discussed and referenced in Boase, whose *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* is still an excellent account (endnote 1), in his footnote 1 (page 4).

There is also a very significant early nineteenth-century predecessor noted by Benton and Boase, Stendhal's *De l'Amour* (1822) which takes as real the medieval Courts of Love, drawing extensively on Andreas Capellanus and also on his Arabic predecessor, "Fragments Extracted from an Arabic MS entitled 'The Book of Love.'" ¹² Stendhal was a major influence on the French revival of interest in *amour courtois*, as founded in Andreas from whom he quotes thirty-one "articles" as an appendix to his wonderfully whimsical book. It is striking in the present context that Stendhal sees

(like Lacan) the English temper as inherently unfriendly to the irresponsibility of courtly love, in the way that, as we have seen, the tradition from Tatlock to the Americans in 1965 was. "The whole scheme of life is as favourable to music and to love in Spain and in Italy, as it is inimical to them in England" (172). We might link the unfanatical scepticism of the English tradition more particularly to the robustly empirical critical spirit that held the ascendancy in English criticism in the mid-twentieth century. And of course it is the correlative of what Bersani calls "the perennially suspect extravagances of Gallic theorizing" to English critical eyes (10).

All this at least calls into question the increasingly standard assumption that courtly love was an invention of the late nineteenth century, an assumption which is in itself a tiresome myth.¹³ But of course the fact that the term was preceded in these ways does not mean that the (re)coining of it by Paris, and the weight attached to it by C.S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love* in 1932, were without significance. After Lewis (who greatly disapproved of all it stood for) courtly love became a major discussion tool in the critical armament of all medievalists, in the ways objected to in 1960s Anglo-American critical orthodoxy. In fact the period from Gaston Paris in the 1880s up to the 1960s could be redefined as just another of the periodically recurring eras significant to the discussion of courtly love.

But that is only the most recent of the eras significant for the criticism of courtly love. From their origins in the High Middle Ages, the texts of courtly love were themselves highly textual and critical. The writings of the troubadours and their contemporaries were not a "creative" flow on which criticism later got to work. They arrived trailing their own criticism, which was often their primary subject, so much so indeed that some critics have seen the literature as concerned more with writing (or "art") than with love.¹⁴ This point is argued clearly by Douglas Kelly: "Two facts are obvious to students of courtly literature: the constant union of art of love and art of poetry, and the durability of the subject of courtly love and the forms used to express it."¹⁵

These facts were true from the beginnings of courtly love poetry, culminating at the *Blütezeit*, the period around 1200 when the dominant literature was composed—especially the poetry but also the considerable amount of prose commentary that attended the troubadours and their school from the beginning. Thus the French editor-critic Jacques Roubaud sees these short prose commentaries as seminal to the development of the great European tradition in fiction: *nouvelle*, *novella*, *cuento*.¹⁶ He sees as a highly significant point the translation into prose of the verse story of Lancelot c.1200, as a "huge polemical anatomy of love" with importance for such works as *Decameron*. This anatomy obviously has links with the French anatomies of love by Andreas Capellanus and Guillaume de Lorris of the following

generation. Roubaud (13) also stresses the symbiotic literary relations between love and language (noted above in connection with Zumthor and Kelly) which is of central importance.

As everyone knows, Lewis said that "everyone knows" that courtly love appeared quite suddenly in Provence in the late eleventh century, in the poems and critical pronouncements of the troubadours. What is certainly incontestable is that the scope of the flowering of lyric, goliardic, and epic poets in the period around 1200 was something beyond anything previously attained in the European vernaculars. Equally groundbreaking was the confidence in the love-poets and their work reflected in the simultaneous development of a criticism and contextualization of the poetry in the rationalizing *razos* and *vidas* of the troubadours and their counterparts in other European languages. As well as the subjects of love, an important and lasting contribution of the courtly love tradition to European literature was an authorial self-awareness and self-scrutiny (the poetry has often been called narcissistic: one of the features that has held such interest for psychoanalytic criticism, as we will see), which has traditionally been seen as a defining property of the Renaissance. Certainly the cult of the poet-lover, with its attendant biographies and criticism, was a powerful influence on the development of the figure of the poet in the English Renaissance.

Lewis's famous claim was an overstatement; but he was putting down an important historical marker. He was putting it down, for the medievalist, with inspiring force as well: "Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature."¹⁷ His notorious contention that courtly love appeared "quite suddenly" in Provence is of course an oversimplification, and the revisionary—and probably now prevailing—view follows Dronke's belief that the circumstantial details of the love situation, as described by the troubadours and their followers, up to Dante and beyond, are universals of psychic experience (Dronke put it in more elegant terms). Of those universal experiences, the single indispensable element, and the largest issue in sociopolitical and psychological terms, remains the opposition that was neatly summarized in 1940 as *Passion and Society*, the English title of de Rougemont's *L'Amour et L'Occident*. "Passion" in De Rougemont's terms describes the individual urge to fulfill sexual impulses, regardless of whether they conform to social interests; it therefore represents a threat to the good conduct of society.¹⁸ This, which is the central plank in the construction of the courtly lover's situation, is a recurrent theme throughout subsequent European literature. The early parts of de Rougemont's book, while he confines himself to drawing inferences from the literary texts, remain a persuasive account of courtly love at its most influential; and his Eros-Thanatos notion recurs in modern French critics such as Roubaud in his grand term *l'éros mélancolique*.¹⁹

Boase points out, importantly, that Lewis and John Wilcox²⁰ “both remained within the French tradition of scholarship set by Jeanroy,”²¹ and of course the closeness of Lewis’s characterization of courtly love to Paris’s is obvious. But we will see that there was also in English a resistance to French scholarly traditions, a resistance which became much more pronounced in the generation after Lewis and Wilcox. Whatever the terms used may have been, medieval love-theory was under active discussion in France and Germany from the start of the Romantic period. Long before Gaston Paris, we have seen that Stendhal’s *On Love* is a classic account of the courtly love condition. Love does have more unvarying centrality in French than English medieval literature, as well as critical discussion; the founding text in French literature is arguably the *Roman de la Rose*, with its aspiration to contain “the whole matter of love.”

But more importantly for this chapter, the issue of transgressive but individually imperative passion remains alive in French criticism, with a term of great significance in modern psychological critical theory: desire. The founding authority here, of course, is Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*, concerned precisely with “the opposition between the individual and civilization,” as it has been described by Bersani.²² It is clear that the medieval courtly idea of socially disruptive passion corresponds closely to the Freudian symptom “desire,” especially as developed by Jacques Lacan. To some degree desire is in lineal descent from it. In discussing Freudian desire, Lacan writes about courtly love itself as what he calls an anamorphosis (the term in art-history for the effect created in a painting when a hidden image—such as Holbein’s death’s head—takes shape for viewers as they change viewpoint).²³ In *Le Séminaire VII*,²⁴ he identifies courtly love as a discourse of poetic craft in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Like Stendhal and later French commentators, he says that England was “only involved at second hand” (145). Lacan discusses courtly love as “an exemplary form of sublimation”: a term, incidentally, which is not new or necessarily very psychoanalytic in this context; Boase (34) notes that Wilcox in 1930 had specified “sublimation through chivalric activity” as a definitive feature of courtly love.

Like Lewis, Lacan sees the beginnings of courtly love in the eleventh century as a major turning point in literary history, a kind of cultural revolution. But he stresses that it was also “a poetic exercise” in which the poetic celebration of the lady as the object of desire is founded on the interdict that makes her unattainable (being married to the king for instance). He goes on to note that these ideas remain influential throughout European history, to the present day:

Courtly love . . . was a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealizing themes, which couldn’t have any real concrete

equivalent. Nevertheless, these ideals, first among which is that of the Lady, are to be found in subsequent periods, down to our own. The influence of these ideals is a highly concrete one in the organization of contemporary man's sentimental attachments, and it continues its forward march. (148)

He concludes this section of his exposition with what is for him—though maybe less so for us as *littérateurs* for whom the signifier has greater primacy—the main point:

Of interest to us from a structural point of view is the fact that an activity of poetic creation was able to exercise a determining influence on manners at a time . . . when the origin of the key concepts . . . has been forgotten. (149)

This is what Lacan means by sublimation, and also by anamorphosis. Though we have mostly forgotten about the origins of many of our assumptions and practices about love in medieval courtly theory, we are still influenced by them. These “artifices have proved so durable,” says Lacan, “thus complicating still the relations between men and the service of women” (151). To study them is to make them take identifiable shape in a more coherent way, to see them for what they are.

Lacan's discussion is probably the most lucid exposition of the psychology of courtly love and the motivations behind it, and therefore of its continuing importance “in subsequent periods, down to our own.”²⁵ What he demonstrates most suggestively is the sociopsychological veracity of the language of courtly love, which emerged “at a time when the historical circumstances bear witness to a disparity between the especially harsh conditions of reality and certain fundamental demands” (150). Passion was popular because it was the only way of compensating for the ways in which the rigid order of society marginalized the unfulfilled and disadvantaged: it was a way of getting back, a compensation. As Lacan says, the social status of some of the poets, beginning with Guilhem IX, the first troubadour, might seem to contradict this. But the “I” of the poet is not the “I” of the poem. The crucial point is that, if Lacanian desire is the same thing as courtly passion, this would suggest that the passion-society dilemma is a social as well as a psychological one.

This conflict between the demands of the well-ordered society and the transgressive sexual inclinations of the individual is what brings together the worlds of the political and the erotic in courtly love, a point raised in the second paragraph above. The figure who makes the personal and the political clash most markedly is the queen (Lacan's ideal of “the Lady”) who is venerated at once as a social figure and a love-object. In the courtly love narrative she is inexorably in love with someone other than the king,

and so she represents the extreme instance of a figure who is central to social stability acting in a way which undermines it. The queens in courtly love history are Iseult, Gráinne, and Guinevere; the lovers are Tristan, Diarmuid, and Lancelot; the kings are Mark, Finn, and Arthur. There are differences in detail: Finn is not a husband but a socially superior suitor, and in this more ancient, Irish story the amorous initiative is taken by Gráinne in terms which are decidedly sexual and uncourtly. But all three stories are centrally concerned with the politically disastrous, and personally fatal, consequences of allowing passion to dominate over society, familiar from Freud's *Discontents*. All three of these series are Celtic; but this does not narrow their relevance so much as it establishes the centrality of this dilemma across the whole of European literature. People have long marveled that the world of a (probably) Welsh king, more than semilegendary, and his court became the archetypal symbol for the expression of a mindset—a mentality—that characterized the central issues of medieval European civilization: what Lacan called “certain discontents of the culture” (150). But the story did not have to center on Arthur and Guinevere; they merely happened to be the subjects of the narrative that this ubiquitous socioerotic dilemma occurred in.

If the behavior of the transgressive lovers in this group is to be tolerated—that is, if they are not to be quite beyond the pale of moral tolerance—they have to be shown to be in the grip of some agency beyond their own volition. They must not just choose infidelity recklessly (though they do so *blindly*; the adverb has to be chosen with caution) but must be driven to it. Hence the love-potion as a metaphor for the adulterous love of Tristan and Iseult; hence too the extraordinarily literal devices they resort to in order to make Mark disbelieve the evidence of his eyes, strategies that meet the letter of the law but flout its spirit. Such events are common in the romances, establishing the narratives as essentially linguistic rather than ethical in their significance. The most notorious instance of this is Iseult's ordeal by fire and the misleading declaration that enables her to survive it. The question of the lover's responsibility for fated actions is often left confused: for example, by Gottfried von Strassburg who, having established at length the mechanical motivation for Iseult's love through the love-potion, still reflects on how dangerous it is to try to control or oversee women in love. “Women do many things just because they are forbidden, from which they would refrain were it not forbidden”;²⁶ clearly the inclination toward antisocial self-indulgence that the courtly world and Freud's discontents are concerned with. Criseyde's “who yaf me drynke?” links her with equal inexorability to this fatedness. A whole intellectual edifice is constructed on the implications for manners of the passion-society conflict, an edifice most fully developed in Castiglione's

Cortegiano and in modern literary theory as Barthes's *jouissance*, which is clearly connected to it.

These features of courtly love stories and the criticism of them establish their sociopsychological basis, which according to Lacan is what gives them their enduring importance and influence. I now want to turn to the illustration of the survival of the concerns of courtly love after the Middle Ages, particularly in English. I will end by arguing for the importance of restoring its conventions to a central place in the criticism of Middle English, side-by-side with the equally central "Ricardian" discussion that sees English literary practice in the late fourteenth century as a radical questioning of conventions.

First, then, I want to consider, extremely superficially, what became of the tradition of courtly love poetry and debate in Europe in the period after the *Blütezeit*, the evidence for the survival of courtly love, which Lacan takes as read. In general, the medieval-Renaissance divide, which literary history has imposed so absolutely, has required a break between the medieval idea of "courtly love" and the more individualized conception of love in the Renaissance. As I have already said in reference to the narcissistic impulse in troubadour poems and *vidas*, the textual facts do not support this version of literary history. *Don Quixote* in the early seventeenth century is a parody of medieval romances, but to taste in full the folly of Don Quixote's devotion to the hardly known, distant lady, Cervantes's readership is expected to know about things such as *amor de lonh* and Jaufre Rudel and the overliteralism of the *vidas*, which were deduced from the troubadours' poems. Despite this, the traditional view of discontinuity between medieval and Renaissance literature and thought was reinforced in England by the hostility of post-Reformation thinkers toward the Catholic Middle Ages.

A further complicating factor in England is that in unacknowledged ways the medieval *was* the literary Renaissance there, especially in the love lyric. The new individualism and literary imagination in English literature was linked to Forster's "petrarchism": the influence of Petrarch on Wyatt and Surrey (and, for that matter, Shakespeare) in the sixteenth century. But Petrarch, the source of that new literary world, was of course a generation older than Chaucer and an influence on him too. Petrarch's dedication to Laura was one of the late classics of medieval courtly love. It is not easy to make a sensible break in the tradition from the troubadours to Dante to Petrarch to the Elizabethan sonneteers to the love-poems of John Donne.

This is not just a matter of proposing a loose alternative tradition; it is a crucial issue for the understanding of particular poems. Placing a poem appropriately in this tradition will prevent us—as in the case of Criseyde's "drynke"—from misreading by modern standards of naturalism (as we think of it). Before looking at later texts for evidence of courtly love influence, and survival, we might recall another of its definitive elements, as well as

"passion and society." For example, when John Donne's love-poems draw on "the religion of love," as they commonly do, he is clearly writing within that world in which Lewis made this idea one of his four definitive features of courtly love. "The Funeral," for example, is full of this love language—"prophanation," "the laity," "ecstasie," "Canonization," "relics." But the twentieth-century inclination to read this language as evidence of genuine passion in Donne, and of devotion to an endless stream of extra-marital *amours*, should pause in the light of the fact that both parareligion and adultery were declared aspects of courtly love by Lewis. The poetic convention is being read with inappropriate literalness. This literalism is comparable with the even unlikelier tendency to read the medieval religion of courtly love as real heresy, most famously by A.J. Denomy.²⁷ In both cases, it is a failure to see convention as convention.

As for Middle English, an obvious place for the reader to begin a consideration of the early survival of courtly love terminology and substantial interest is the secular love-lyric. It is curious how little attention has been paid to this since Chaytor's first demonstration, in his important but now largely ignored *The Troubadours and England*,²⁸ of how widely the pan-European love-situations and language permeated these lyrics (which of course have long been recognized as one of the first literary glories in vernacular English). The tendency has increasingly been to separate the English lyrics from the European. Even Stephen Manning, in a context which might have been expected to make links, separated them: "One type of lyric [his example is Arnaut Daniel's Provençal] is extremely form-conscious, the other [his example is the Harley lyric "Lenten is come with love to tounne"] suggests the immediacy of the emotion, and may therefore be called dramatic."²⁹ This opposition conforms to the formal-European versus pragmatic-English pattern. Even in the Harley Lyrics, where the introduction to Brook's edition led the way in pointing out the presence of this pattern in them,³⁰ not a lot of critical attention has been given to this influence. I do not want to multiply the evidence for too long; where it is present it is very obvious. But this evidence is important to challenge the traditional representation of the Middle English lyric as cut off from continental developments. The standard view, which we have seen repeated by Stendhal and Lacan, has been that England missed out on the glories of the European *Blütezeit*, and that in the period around 1200 only a few freakishly unaccountable texts such as "The Owl and the Nightingale" are linked with European literature—with the Latin goliards in that case. Apart from that, we are lamenting with R.T. Davies "a lost world of song," or with R.M. Wilson "a lost literature."³¹ It is true that the Harley lyrics appear much later, probably about 1340; furthermore we often admire them primarily—and justifiably so—for their Englishness: the way they often incorporate into their

sophisticated European forms strange vestiges of Old English formulas and vocabulary. But what is equally remarkable is how fully and easily the poems have replicated the notoriously intricate forms of the troubadours. "Alyosun," for example, is an accomplished variant on the *ballade/balata form*; and even more virtuoso and accomplished is the employment of the stanza form developed by the troubadour Marcabru in "Lenten is come with love to toun."³²

More importantly for the discussion of courtly love though, the poems have also fully internalized the *terminology* of the great European love-poets of 1200. I say "internalized" because that terminology occurs with admirable ease side-by-side with diction and forms from Old English. It is not putting it too strongly to say that, in many cases, that terminology is translated in the same way that the thirteenth-century German, French, and Italian poets translated the terminology of Provençal. The normal belief, as stated by Lacan for example, is that "it doesn't matter whether we take [the terms] from the Southern French domain or the German domain except as far as the signifier is concerned" (146). That is, the full terminology is taken to be totally shared by Provençal, the German of the *Minnelieder*, Italian, and Northern French too, all assumed to be representing identical signifieds: lady, tale-bearers, dawn-song, and so on. This is partly a matter of etymology, as well as political history: all the courtly love languages mentioned above, except for German, share a romance origin. In the case of German, translation was inevitable since French was not an intelligible option; the opacity of post-Conquest English was clearly mitigated by the existence of Anglo-Norman. There was no *need* to develop a set of terms in England where the court language and the official language of culture was French.

However, the etymological situation too is more complicated than Lacan's account suggests. C. Stephen Jaeger, in his vital but underrecognized study *The Origins of Courtliness*,³³ shows that the lexical relations between European languages in the Middle Ages were not totally straightforward. As one counterexample, the courtly Latin word *disciplina* (corresponding to the German *zuht*) has fifteenth-century English relations but lacks a counterpart in Provençal and Old French (132). Moreover, English is not quite as cut off from these translations and transpositions as Lacan's claims for the substitutable signifiers suggests. Thus the "Alyosun" poet suffers from "love-longinge"; he is in his lady's French-borrowed "bandoun" and praises her "bounte"—the language of the *Roman de la Rose*. But the formulaic phrase "geynest under gore"—"brightest under dress" (another of the Harley lyrics has "bryttest under bys" as an alliterative alternative)—is an amorous domestication of the language of *Beowulf*, as is the gnomic couplet at the end:

Betere is tholien while sore
Then mournen evermore. (33–4)

The sporadic heavy alliteration, especially on "w," is also native English, as is much of the vocabulary: "lossum" (15), "feye" (20), and "hendy" (9). Chaucer's "boystous" Manciple would note the shift of register involved in developing Alison from surpassing "alle wimmen" (*Canterbury Tales* IX (H), 11) into a courtly "levedy" (23). This is a courtly love poem, a reverie of the type written by Bernart de Ventadorn, transposed into English.

This philological excursus is instructive for the main theme of this essay. It shows, as Jaeger's evidence partly implies, that courtly love language and ideas were present at least in late Middle English. Moreover, the more its occurrences are interwoven with the literary language and conventions of Old English, the more naturalized it can claim to be in English. The relations of the lines quoted from "Alysoun" with *Beowulf* on the one hand and courtly love language on the other raises in passing an interesting question of poetics: as a consequence of this mixed cultural inheritance, do they make sense? It is perfectly logical for *Beowulf* to say, "it is better for anyone that he should avenge his friend rather than mourn excessively." But in these lines, constructed on the same formula, is it really logical for the lover to say, "it is better to suffer terribly for a while rather than grieve for ever"? The two do not seem to be fully alternative. Perhaps the *Beowulfian* "then mournen evermore" is introduced without a full alertness to its implications and literary heritage. But there is no doubt that the poetic lexicon was etymologically mixed.

As a last, and familiar, instance of the influence of courtly love in the medieval-Renaissance English lyric, I want to take briefly the lyric "O mestres whye,"³⁴ composed to the same tune as Wyatt's "My lute and I"; both are a kind of *placatus*. But the Harley poem, whose manuscript is from Wyatt's time, is full of French-derived courtly love language: "pleasaunce," "pastaunce," "company," "comforte," "strange" (twice), "grace" and "chaise." The Wyatt poem is much less courtly, but it still has many of the related terms: "relief," "pitye," "soverainte," "desire," and "mischief." Both poems still belong to the medieval country world.

Turning to the modern period and the survival of courtly love ideas there, I want to take two examples (illustrations could have been taken from any poet in the Romantic period, pretty well). The first, lightweight but definitive, comes from Housman's *Shropshire Lad* (1887):

Oh, when I was in love with you
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,

And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.³⁵

This is a long way from the systematic abstractions of the courtly code, but it expresses its spirit perfectly. The lover is perfected by love and behaves, as with the *Corteggiano's* *jouissance*, with courtly grace; once he stops being in love, he is "quite myself again." Denied the lady's favor, he is returned from the transcendent. But, to put it more portentously, without love, or passion, he is restored to his unelevated social and ideological condition.

My second modern example is, in critical terms at least, somewhat grander: the explicit interpretation of a modern poet in the light of courtly love, Gloria C. Kline's book *The Last Courtly Lover: Yeats and the Idea of Woman* (endnote 13). Kline is greatly influenced by D.W. Robertson's view that courtly love belongs to "19th and 20th-century cultural history" (2), and her subject is what she calls "Yeats's mythopoesis of courtly love" (4). Yeats was "role-playing" as the poet in love, according to Kline, having fallen in love, not with Maud Gonnet "whom he scarcely knew, but with his own projected *anima*, the 'woman within himself,' " as a stimulus to the "creative imagination" (11). Yeats, it is true, was particularly aware of medieval and Renaissance theories of love, partly because of his schooling in the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti.

But the question remains: how *particular* is all this to the medieval courtly world? If Dronke is right in his belief in the universality of the codes and attitudes in that love, how definitively can we assign Yeats's presentation of Maud Gonnet to the medieval system, rather than simply seeing it as the postures taken timelessly by all lovers, with the inevitable self-abasement, reverence, and despair? Yeats is a particularly interesting case because of his insistence on nonrequital, a major issue in *amour courtois*. In a recent essay on Yeats, Deirdre Toomey gives evidence that when Maud Gonnet *did* show signs of responding to him sexually, Yeats reacted with due courtly horror, wishing to retain the Dantesque-Petrarchan condition of unrequited poet-lover.³⁶ "His position was that he was in love with her, but that this required no action." (12) But in one of Yeats's greatest love-poems there is a wonderful moment which is much enriched by an awareness of its courtly-love heritage. Lacan, like everyone else, notes the impersonality of the lady, the love-object. All the courtly poets seem to be addressing the same person. In keeping with this, Yeats's poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* in 1899 are spoken by "The Lover" or "He," and addressed to "You" or "She" or "His Beloved." But, suddenly, the poem "Broken Dreams" (1919)³⁷ begins "There is grey in your hair," going on to note "Your small hands were not beautiful": a detail which is an extraordinary breach of the courtly expectation by being physically specific and,

even more, by being negative. But of course the full impact of these moments is only realized by awareness of the tradition they are written in and in breach of.

One of the reasons for mentioning this expressly counter-courtly moment in Yeats, the love-poet who wrote,

There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books,³⁸

is that it recalls one of the most memorable moments in Stendhal's *On Love*. Describing the condition of the young German officer who is hopelessly smitten with Signora Gherardi (whose husband is present) "in the old high way of love,"³⁹ the narrator says,

For instance he began to praise Signora Gherardi's hand which had been marked with smallpox when she was a child in a very odd manner and which had remained much pitted and very brown in consequence. (361)

The courtly lover is a blind idealist; but Yeats is memorably conceding that Maud Gonnet's hands were not beautiful. But the great significance of this moment cannot be appreciated without seeing it in the context of Yeats's previous Gonnet poems, which have belonged so devotedly to the world of courtly love, just as we need to recognize Criseyde's allusion to the love-potion.

I want to turn for a final instance to the most prominent issue for the English medievalist, the backdrop of courtly love in the works of Chaucer, where it is inextricable from the fabric of the narrative. Leaving aside the obvious texts—*The Book of the Duchesse*, *Troilus*, the *Franklin's Tale*, and so on—I will take a very small and indirect occurrence. Returning to the Manciple, shortly before he confesses his crude "boystousness," he reflects on the imperatives of nature and nurture in ways that are clearly linked to the issues of passion and society:

For men han evere a likerous appetit
On lower thing to parfourme hire delit
Than on hire wyves, be they never so faire,
Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire.
Flesch is so newefangel, with meschaunce,
That we ne konne in nothing han plesaunce
That sowneth into vertu any while. (IX(H), 189–95)

The *Tom Jones*-like point here, of turning aside from the wife who is fair, true, and debonair—the word “fragrant” was famously used to make precisely this contrast in the 1990s—toward a “lower thing,” is what the Manciple proceeds to reflect on. But the transgressive impulse is there too; the “likorous appetit” is a low-life version of passion again, a departure from the socially responsible path of husbandly “vertu,” something in which the lover cannot have “plesaunce”—again—for “any while.”

My general conclusion returns to where I started: not only is courtly love not an impediment to the understanding of medieval texts—it is an indispensable prerequisite to their understanding, as well as to the interpretation of large parts of the later English poetic tradition from Wyatt and Donne to Housman and Yeats. Without some knowledge of that system, we miss an important part of what those poets believed themselves to be writing. We might take warning from the prologue to Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde*, that

Ek for to wynnen love in sundry ages,
In sundry londes, sundry ben usages. (II.27–8)

Many modern critics have been ready to say “so nold I nat love purchase” (II.33). It is abundantly clear that love was differently purchased and expressed in the Middle Ages—something which has recently been spectacularly demonstrated in Stephen Jaeger’s *Ennobling Love*.⁴⁰ Courtly love does have different usages to ours, as well as serving as an important source for many of our surviving usages, in culture and poetics. The duty of the critic is to see both its familiarity and its differences: something which the Anglophone critical world, particularly in North America, has been strangely unwilling to do, even after it was famously argued for by H.R. Jauss.⁴¹ Outside of that world, from the Renaissance to modern German and French scholarship, the history of courtly love has always been assumed as part of the educated critic’s knowledge and culture.

The remaining question is, why *has* courtly love been so unpopular in the recent English tradition? Why has there been an impatient scepticism about the very existence and nature of courtly love, ever since Cross and Nitze voiced it in—of all things—their study of *Lancelot and Guinevere* in 1930?⁴² The scepticism culminates side by side with one of the great insights into Middle English literature, Burrow’s *Ricardian Poetry* (endnote 9). Accounting for the great flowering in Middle English poetry in the last third of the fourteenth century (Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the *Gawain*-poet), Burrow emphasized their effectiveness in subjecting literary traditions and conventions to the test of reality. The knight has to be perfectly Christian and the perfect courtly lover, but what happens, the *Gawain*-poet asks, if in

practice those duties conflict? Since Burrow's book, much of the critical energy in Middle English studies has been devoted to illustrating this realistic questioning in historical and textual ways, in keeping with the long traditions of English empiricism and with a jaundiced eye on Bersani's "Gallic theorizing." But it is equally important to keep alive a knowledge of, and even some sympathy with, the literary conventions that the Ricardian sceptics were examining. And perhaps the most important of those—and, according to the psychoanalysts, not the least realistic—was courtly love.

Notes

1. Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1977).
2. D.W. Robertson, "The Concept of courtly love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts," in F.X. Newman, *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1968), pp. 1–18. Also in the same volume see, J.F. Benton, "Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love," pp. 19–42., E.T. Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love," originally 1965; reprinted in *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 154–163.
3. William Matthews, "Inherited Impediments in Medieval Literary History," in William Mathews, *Medieval Secular Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).
4. James J. Wilhelm, *The Cruellest Month: Spring, Nature and Love in Classical and Medieval Lyrics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).
5. Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
6. A good example is Paolo Cherchi, *Andreas and the Ambiguity of Courtly Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Important and representative anthologies are Joan M. Ferrante and George D. Economou, *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1975); *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. K. Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1997); and *The Court Reconvenes: International Courtly Literature Society 1998*, ed. B.K. Altmann and C.W. Carroll (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003). The first of these is well known in Anglo-American circles, and the third is published in England. But neither has much to say about literature in English.
7. Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 10.
8. J.S.P. Tatlock, "The People in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *PMLA* 56 (1941): 85–104.
9. The dominant discussion of *Sir Gawain* in English was J.A. Burrow's excellent *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), a reading whose theoretical basis was clarified in Burrow's highly influential *Ricardian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

- For a reading of *Gawain* which was more friendly to courtly love see J.F. Kiteley, "The *De Arte Honeste Amandi* of Andreas Capellanus and the concept of courtesy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Anglia* 79 (1961): 7–16.
10. *Le Roman de la Rose*, p. 38.
 11. *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), II.651. All subsequent quotations from Chaucer are from this edition.
 12. Stendhal, *On Love*, admirably translated by Vyvyan Holland (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), pp. 216–221. My page-references are to Holland's translation.
 13. Casually accepted, for example, by Gloria C. Kline in *The Last Courtly Lover: Yeats and the Idea of Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1983). Kline quotes Robertson as her authority for the nineteenth-century origins of courtly love.
 14. The principal figure here is Paul Zumthor in *Langue et techniques poétiques à l'époque romane xi–xiii siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), and in "Le Grand Chant Courtois," in *Essai de poésie médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972). The latter is translated by Philip Bennett as *Toward a Medieval Poetics* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Minnesota and Oxford, 1992). The stark contrast between Zumthor's stylistic poetics and his contemporaries in Anglo-American criticism need not be labored.
 15. Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. xi.
 16. Jacques Roubaud, *La fleur inverse: L'Art des Troubadours* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994).
 17. C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 4.
 18. *Passion and Society* was the admirably aphoristic title of the English translation in England. The American title, *Love and the Western World*, is of course closer to de Rougemont's original.
 19. Jacques Roubaud, *La Fleur Inverse*, p. 14.
 20. John Wilcox, "Defining courtly love," in *Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters* xii (1930): 313–325.
 21. Boase, p. 34; Alfred Jeanroy, *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Hachette, 1889).
 22. Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 3.
 23. See Nancy Frelick, "Lacan, courtly love and Anamorphosis," in Altmann-Carroll (endnote 4, above), pp. 107–114.
 24. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre VII, L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986). In English *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 7, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. with notes by Dennis Porter (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992). My references in the text are to the English translation.
 25. Though there is, incidentally, an extensive literature on the relations of courtly love and the Ovidian handbooks with psychoanalytic theory.

- An extreme example is Michael Balint's view of the development of infantile experimentation "into adult genitality, changing it into 'love-making' in the sense of the various *artes amandi*," *Primary Love and Psycho-Analytic Technique* (London: Liveright, 1965), p. 119.
26. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, c.1210, trans. A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 277.
 27. A.J. Denomy, *The Heresy of Courtly Love* (New York: D.X. McMullen, 1947).
 28. H.J. Chaytor, *The Troubadours and England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923).
 29. Stephen Manning, "Game and Earnest in the Middle English and Provençal Love Lyrics," in *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966): 230.
 30. G.L. Brook, *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of Harley 2253* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), pp. 8–14.
 31. R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1952).
 32. See Brook, *The Harley Lyrics*, pp. 33, 43–44, and Introduction, p. 7. Brook's own evidence seems to work against his view that "[t]hese lyrics are more popular in origin than the lyrics written under the influence of the courtly love convention" (7).
 33. C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness. Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). Chapter 8, "The Language of Courtesy: Latin Terminology, Vernacular Counterparts" (pp. 127–175) is a particularly full and enlightening account of its subject.
 34. Ms. Harley 2252. Printed in *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), pp. 35–36.
 35. A.E. Housman, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Allen Lane, 1988), p. 40.
 36. Deirdre Toomey, "Labyrinths: Yeats and Maud Gonne," in *Yeats and Women*, ed. D. Toomey (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 1–40.
 37. W.B. Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A.N. Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 256.
 38. W.B. Yeats, "Adam's Curse," *Yeats's Poems*, pp. 132–133.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
 40. C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
 41. H.R. Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History* 10.2 (Winter 1979): 181–227.
 42. T.P. Cross and W.A. Nitze, *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

CHAPTER 2

LOVE BEFORE TROILUS

Helen Cooper

Précis: Chaucer's adoption of the model of the man's falling in love as normative has occluded the widespread English romance practice of making the woman central.

To think about love in Chaucer's poetry, for most readers, is probably to recall first those male lovers—Palamon and Arcite, Troilus—who set eyes on their lady and are struck to the heart by the arrow of the God of Love. Falling in love is initiated by the male gaze, and it is typically followed up by the man's bewildered and mournful self-analysis as he attempts to understand what has happened to him. The experience is as hard to articulate in words as is the mystic experience of the divine, and medieval authors famously borrowed the language of each to describe the other. The *Song of Songs* helped to inspire St. Bernard to formulate a language of religious love; on the secular side, Petrarch developed a language of figure and paradox to describe the lover's state of mind that set the fashion in Europe for the next three hundred years and beyond. The lover's gaze and its consequences became almost a metonym for lyric poetry. For Chaucer, Petrarch opened up new possibilities that gave him exactly what he needed for his Troilus once the narrative of the smitten lover's gaze gives way to lyric introspection:

"If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.

And if that at myn owen lust I brenne,
 From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
 If harm agree me, wherto pleyne I thenne?
 I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte.
 O quike deth, O swete harm so queynthe,
 How may of the in me swich quantite,
 But if that I consente that it be?

And if that I consente, I wrongfully
 Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
 Al sterelees withinne a boot am I
 Amydde the see, bitwixen windes two,
 That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
 Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
 For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye."

(*Troilus and Criseyde*, I.400–20)¹

This *Canticus Troili* famously constitutes the first translation of a Petrarchan sonnet into English. It is necessarily written in the first person: it cannot be presented as a narratorial description of the lover's state of mind, since that state of mind is too inward, too individual, to be focalized through anyone else. The metaphor of being at the mercy of the sea, those paradoxes of contrasting and coexisting heat and cold, bitterness and sweetness, love as good and love as bad, love as a "wondre maladie", become the stock in trade of every poet-lover, or every poet wanting to present himself as a lover. A language in which the speaker claims to lose all agency, to be at the mercy of the elements or of a tyrannous god, enables the poet to take control of an area of experience so inchoate and bewildering that the very act of poetic mastery declares his cleverness and skill. Troilus may not think of it that way, but there can be no doubt that Petrarch and Chaucer both have such an idea in the forefront of their minds.

Petrarch himself had not had to start from scratch in inventing his language of bewilderment and longing. Similar things had been happening in poetry two centuries before either he or Chaucer started writing. Troilus tossed around in his boat "al sterelees," at the mercy of contrary winds, appears to embody a trademark Petrarch image, but a closely similar idea had been made famous two centuries earlier in Isolde's uncertainty as to whether she is suffering from love or seasickness—or if it is not an uncertainty, then at least the one can be presented as the other, in an attempt on her part to keep discovery at bay by coding the symptoms without denying the condition. In Thomas's Norman French, the confusion allows for some useful punning: useful in that it offers Isolde a code—on *l'amer*, *amer*, *la mer* (Troilus's "love," "savory" (salty bitterness), "the sea")—that enables her

to speak of her love without revealing it:

“Merveille est k’om la mer ne het
 Que si amer mal en mer set,
 Et que l’anguisse est si amere!” . . .
 [Tristan] ne set si cele dolur
 Ad de la mer ou de l’amur,
 Ou s’ele dit “amer” de “la mer”
 Ou pur “l’amur” diët “amer.”

[“It is a wonder that that person does not hate the sea/love who is so bitterly sick at sea and for whom the pain of it is so bitter!” . . . [Tristan] does not know if she is suffering because of the sea or because of love, or if, when she says “loving,” she means “the sea,” or whether instead of “love” she is saying “bitterness.”]²

The combination of metaphor and verbal ambiguity caught the imagination of writers sufficiently even for the passage to be transferred, with some difficulty, into Middle High German, in Gottfried von Strassburg’s adaptation of the *Tristan*. Variants of the story that do not contain this particular passage, such as Eilhart von Oberg’s adaptation of some earlier version, still give Isolde a long monologue in which she engages in just the same kind of introspection as Troilus and Petrarch offer in lyric mode.

Striking as the similarities of metaphor and self-analysis are, there is a marked divide between the *Tristan* texts and the works of fourteenth-century authors, in that in the *Tristan* the introspection is put into the mouth of the woman. The poet may still be showing off, but he has to obliterate himself in order to do it. Isolde’s monologue is not a free-standing poem, nor even a lyric insert, but a dramatic projection of character, and a female character at that. Petrarch and the Troilus of the *Canticus* eliminate the subjecthood of their ladies, Laura and Criseyde (it has indeed been questioned whether Laura even existed, whether she might not rather have been invented as a device for display on the part of the male poet),³ and Petrarchism, along with the whole phenomenon of “courtly love,” has been charged, with some reason, with commodifying its women, turning them into a part of the symbolic assets of the writer. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley note that in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, “For a male author to write women in these periods, was to refer not to women, but to men—to desire not relationship with women, but relationship to the traditions of male textual activity, and, by extension, of male social and political privilege.”⁴ Lyric poetry, with its typically male authors from the time of the early Provençal troubadours forward, had found its central trope in casting the poet as lover.⁵ In the thirteenth century, the dream poem, with its requirement of a first-person narrator (unless you recount your

own dream, no one else can know it has happened), was exploited by Guillaume de Lorris in his section of *Le Roman de la Rose* to develop the trope into an extended narrative of falling in love, though its allegorical form, with the lover's experiences dramatized as separate personifications, largely prevents lyric introspection. Narrative poetry, however, insists on a much greater measure of impersonality than either lyric or dream poetry, and the greater separation of poet from subject was marked from the earliest vernacular texts concerned with love—in effect, the earliest romances—by privileging the feelings and the voices of women over those of men.

The process can be seen in one of the very earliest of the works that marked the generic shift from epic or *chanson de geste* to romance—that is, a work that set out to distinguish itself as a different kind of writing from its epic model: *Le Roman d'Eneas*. Virgil's epic is, famously, the story of the Trojan hero who traveled the Mediterranean until he reached Italy, resisting along the way the temptation of staying with the woman—Dido, a queen in her own right—whose love he had appeared to reciprocate. In Italy, he defeats the rival claimant to both the land and Lavinia and so establishes the territorial base from which Rome will in due course be founded. The *Eneas* follows Virgil's outline reasonably closely until Eneas has reached Italy; at that point it focuses on, and through, a character whom its epic original had left almost characterless, Lavinia herself. Virgil's interest in her is effectively confined to a single blush in a double simile (*Aeneid* 12.66–9: an example, again, of the poet's using the woman as poetic commodity). In the *Eneas*, she takes over the narrative almost entirely for the last fifth of the story. In this text, some eighty years before Guillaume de Lorris, most of two hundred before Petrarch, it is she, not the male lover, who is shot through eye by the god of love when she first sees the man on whom she sets her heart.

Amors l'a de son dart ferue;
ainz qu'el se fust d'iluec meüe,
i a changié cent foiz colors:
or est cheoite es laz d'amors,
voille ou non, amer l'estuet.

[Love struck [Lavinia] with his arrow. Before she moved away [from the window], she changed color a hundred times. Now she has fallen into the snare of love; whether she wishes to or not, she has to love.]⁶

She has already been engaging in a discussion with her mother as to what love is, “que est amors?” (7901), but at that point she is incapable of understanding the answer precisely because a first-person experience is necessary:

“Comance, asez an savras puis” (7899)

[“Begin [to love], and then you will know all about it.”]

Now, shutting herself alone in her chamber, Lavine responds to that new experience in a long soliloquy—a very long soliloquy, running to some four hundred lines, the same length as some entire short romances (some of the *lais* of Marie de France, or the *Wife of Bath's Tale*). It reads like a vastly extended version of the self-analysis of the *Canticus Troili*: she notes that she is both healthy and ill, chilled and feverish; she longs to flee but does not want to; she suffers bitterness without sweet; she condemns Love as a tyrant. She concludes with a passionate declaration of fidelity, that she will never change:

A toz jors serai vostre amie,
ja vostre amor ne changerai;
soiez segur: se ge vos ai,
ja n'amerai home fors vos. (8376–79)

[I shall be your love forever, and never change my love for you. Be sure of this: if I have you, I shall not love any man but you.]

In a man's mouth, it would be familiar seduction material (what Langland was to call “fair biheste and many a fals truthe,” pretty promises and false vows (*Piers Plowman*, xx.118))⁷ or poetic trope; in a woman's voice, it sounds much more like a wedding vow and so carries an altogether heavier weighting of personal commitment, a weighting endorsed both here and almost universally in later romances.⁸ Lavine's soliloquizing extends beyond this first grand speech too: she lies awake in her bed all night agonizing over the pain of love, just as every later Petrarchan lover would do. Finally she decides not just to talk but also to act, and she literalizes that figure of the arrow of love by wrapping a message to Eneas around a real arrow (the written text is never given: her direct expressions of love are all made through private thought) and having it shot so that it lands at his feet. When he looks up to see where it has come from, he at last sets eyes on her for the first time. Although he is similarly love-struck, his role remains predominantly one of action: he is given a soliloquy, but he has to hold back his feelings in front of his men, and his analysis of love is not assigned nearly as much space as hers. It is also made very clear that he is far less single-minded than she is about what he wants. She desires him; he desires her and the lands to which she is heiress, as a package. The king, he claims, had promised,

“que la terre m'otroieroit,
o sa fille la me donroit.
Isi la claim” (9373–5)

[“that he would grant me his land, and give me his daughter. Here I claim it/her.”]

The last singular feminine pronoun, “la,” combines Eneas’s claim to both land and woman in a single concept, a single possession. But it is clear from the rest of the narrative that she will take possession of him as much as he of her. She will not be just a commodity traded between men, in Gayle Rubin’s feminist anthropological terms,⁹ though the men may like to think so. Turnus wants her and has an earlier agreement with her father to that effect; Latinus is ready to marry her instead to Eneas; Turnus and Eneas battle for her and her lands—but, crucially, she is presented as making her own decision and as following that through in action. If she is a commodity, a material asset, she is one that arranges her own future in despite of who owns her. Although her father endorses her decision, it is her will that dominates in bringing about her marriage.

The space and attention given to Lavine radically alter the balance of the narrative. She is the primary heroine of the *Eneas*, while Dido, in defiance of all literary history before and after, shrinks to a bit part. The change of emphasis fits with the new tenor given to the work. For Virgil, Dido was the woman Aeneas had to reject in order to found Rome. For the author of *Le Roman d’Eneas*, Lavine is the woman Eneas has to marry in order to found Rome. If there is any rejection of a lover in this version, it is done by the woman, in Lavine’s own refusal of Turnus. The *translatio imperii* to which the text implicitly looks forward is not Augustus’s Roman Empire, but all the kingdoms of western Europe that, in the view of medieval historians and storytellers, derived their origins from the promise of offspring inherent in Lavine’s declaration of passion. Four of the nine surviving manuscripts of the *Eneas* accordingly follow it with Wace’s *Brut*, which tells the sequel in so far as it relates to Britain, and two of these four run the texts on from each other without a break.¹⁰ Lavine’s sexuality forms the crucial link between Troy and the future, the present of the author and readers of the *Eneas*. Her choice as to where she will bestow her erotic and political patronage is the foundation of the dynasties of the medieval world.

Lavine is a foundational figure, not only for the states of western Europe, but also for romance itself. The *Eneas* was apparently written by a Norman poet and probably therefore within the ambience of the Angevin court, quite possibly under royal patronage, and it was widely influential. Marking as it does the point where romance begins to invent itself as a genre distinct from epic, it thus suggests that the discourses of love we associate both with courtly literature and eventually with Petrarchism, and therefore increasingly with the elimination of women’s subjecthood, actually began as a discourse developed specifically to be put into the mouths of women. Her treatment suggests too that the active, wooing female heroine was the generically central figure in the early development of romance: the heroine with a mind of her own, both in terms of getting what she wanted

and in having a consciousness of her own, a sense of herself, in particular when she is jolted into such a sense by love. The kind of consciousness invented for her markedly contradicts the current received wisdom on the suppression of women within medieval love discourse. The Ovidian roots sometimes suggested for her are inadequate to explain her: she shares neither the raging passion of the sex-hungry women of the *Metamorphoses*, nor the narrative-weighted laments of the abandoned mistresses of the *Heroides*.¹¹ This new kind of heroine—powerful in her own right, passionate, and given full agency—seems to have served as something of a generic marker for romance, especially in Anglo-Norman and later in English.¹² Thus romance in England in both vernaculars produces early heroines such as the heiresses Rigmel/Rimenhild of *Horn* or La Fièvre/the Fere of *Ipomedon*, or preserves the early French Melior of *William of Paleme*. English romance before Chaucer, in other words, allowed a dominance to the heroine comparable to what we associate with the heroines of Shakespearean comedy and romance (which indeed are the direct descendants of this tradition).

There are good historical reasons for the presence of such heroines in twelfth-century romance. They are early enough to carry over some traits from the greater liberty afforded women in earlier centuries, still reflected in some of the *chansons de geste*, and which in England maintained an influence carried over from the Saxon/Viking era long after the Norman Conquest. The active heroine was given a further major boost by a change in the ecclesiastical definition of marriage. Pope Alexander III (1159–81) insisted that what made a marriage valid was not parental decision or public ceremony, but simply the consent of the spouses: the agreement of both husband and wife that they did indeed desire the marriage, and their vows to each other with or without any kind of parental or ecclesiastical blessing. A further change in inheritance patterns occurring around the same time, from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, gave additional unprecedented political as well as sexual patronage to the heiress. Previously, if there were no direct male heir, then a territory and its associated titles might well pass to the most appropriate male relative. In the course of the twelfth century, the principles of primogeniture began to be more tightly established, so that if a magnate had no surviving son, then rather than the property reverting to a cadet line, his daughter would inherit. Sole daughters became a much more desirable commodity under such a system, and heiresses more economically reliable and very much richer. Those daughters moreover brought with them not only land but the titles and political power that went with it, titles and power that were then borne and exercised by their husbands.¹³ The story of Lavine already reflects such practices, and the emphasis given to her in the *Eneas* becomes all the more comprehensible in their light.

The precise processes by which all this came about are obscure, but it is clear that they followed somewhat different patterns in France and England. English law both confirmed the rights of heiresses more strongly than French, and also established, supposedly as early as the reign of Henry I but certainly by the end of the twelfth century, the principle known as the "courtesy of England," by which a husband continued to hold his wife's titles and lands even after her death so long as she had given birth to a child, whether or not that child survived her.¹⁴ The comparatively lesser benefits of marriage to an heiress under continental French laws seem in turn to be reflected by the rather different kind of romance that came to be favored there,¹⁵ where the Lavine variety of heroine loses her primacy to a courtly lady who is the object of male adoration, and who can bestow nothing but sexual favor on her lover: most typically indeed another man's wife, who is out of the marriage stakes and whose personal economic status is therefore beside the point. An author such as Chrétien de Troyes, writing in the wake of the *Eneas*, will offer both kinds of heroine. Soredamors, the heroine of the first generation in *Cligés*, is given the first of the lovers' soliloquies, as Isolde is (and she too complains of love and seasickness together), and she is also designed to recall Lavine, though she has neither her economic weight nor, in tandem with that, her readiness to take the initiative. In a later work, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Chrétien introduces the woman as the courtly object of love in the form of Guinevere, her first entry into literature in such a role. By 1200 or so, the latter variety of heroine had largely displaced the former in continental French. The Norman invaders of England by contrast were often keen to invent legendary origins to give a veneer of lineal legitimacy to their territorial possession, and the idea of marriage of a young outsider to a wealthy heiress offered a perfect way to do it. It did to some degree actually happen, but romances could set the whole process further back in time. The figure of the wooing heiress thus held sway both legally and imaginatively in England throughout the Middle Ages, in response both to different cultural pressures and to different inheritance laws. The *Eneas* was never, so far as we know, translated into Middle English, but a number of Anglo-Norman romance writers clearly knew it (not least Hue de Rotelande, Hue of Rhuddlan, author of *Ipomedon*), and they transmitted the Lavine model of the heroine through to Middle English.

Even in Middle English, of course, such heroines were not universal in romance, and it would be perverse to suggest that the active and passionate heroine is a *sine qua non* of the genre. It would however be far more accurate to take as the central model of English romance womanhood the wooing heiress rather than the adulterous lady of C.S. Lewis's "courtly love" model.¹⁶ The wives Isolde and Guinevere are exceptional in terms of the

insular romance tradition as a whole, and they were accorded remarkably little attention in Middle English before Malory incorporated them into his *Arthurian*. Later readers who do not take the adultery model for granted will tend to assume instead that the typical heroine of romance is the disdainful courtly lady, and there were indeed plenty of those around (Guy of Warwick's Felice would be the best-known example in medieval England; Brian Helgeland's 2001 film *A Knight's Tale*, the most recent). Audiences in France from the 1150s to the 1170s, however, and English authors throughout the Middle Ages, seem none the less to have thought of the actively desiring maiden as the typical heroine, even if she was not generically definitive. The wooing heiress becomes so much a part of the horizon of expectations of romance that she triggers generic recognition in an audience as decisively as does a knight riding out on a quest (the wooing wife, by contrast, is likely to be a marker for fabliau). Such a woman, furthermore, is one of the strongest markers for a happy ending—and this is true not only within the story, but also within those genealogical romances that concern themselves with the origins of a great house. The maiden who makes her own choice of husband and sets about getting him, in defiance of parental authority, not only achieves personal fulfillment, but often also becomes the ancestress of a whole dynasty. She therefore has a place at the very heart of the greatest concerns of the secular world of the Middle Ages, of territory and family. Lavine is only the first of a number of such founding mothers; later examples include Melusine, the half-fairy foundress of the house of Lusignan. A great dynasty seems to have felt the need for a great mother as well as a great forefather.¹⁷

Those female protagonists of medieval romance who do not marry the hero do not usually get pregnant either, whether they are married to someone else (as Guinevere and Isolde are) or not married at all (like Criseyde). The very point of the heiress's bestowal of her love by contrast is that she should produce children. The commonest medieval theory of physiology, derived from Galen, stated that both the man and woman had to achieve orgasm in order for conception to take place, since pregnancy required seed to be released by each of the partners. The actively desiring woman thus becomes almost a guarantee of the continuation of a dynasty. It is true that the loudest and most strident male voices in the Middle Ages expressed a fear of women's sexuality, but they emanated largely from within the Church and are often inseparable from the propaganda in favor of celibacy. In the secular world of the great majority of the population, by contrast, if these romances reflect any kind of larger cultural ideology—and they would scarcely have become so widespread if they did not—women's sexuality was perceived altogether differently, as integral to the creation and continuation of the family. Many romances specify that the woman conceives a child on

her wedding night, in a coding for mutual desire which, far from being feared, was regarded as the highest secular good.

Such ideas of the woman's instigation of mutual love are at odds with one particular area in which courtly love literature has recently received considerable attention, and that has to do with the male gaze: a gaze that in romance as in cinema is typically regarded as objectifying women.¹⁸ Lavine and her gazing descendants clearly offer a rather different, pro-female model, though they do in the process invite the charge of being mere male fantasy. Any young man, and not least one from that group of landless young men, the *iuvenes*, whom Georges Duby proposed as the primary audience for early romance,¹⁹ is likely to fantasize about being gazed on and passionately loved by a beautiful rich young woman. The gaze in such a case would be a marker for male narcissism, not moral agency, and the soliloquy would become ventriloquism, not an attempt to create female subjecthood. Such discourse is not, however, confined to male authors. Marie de France offers an identical scenario when Guilliadun, the heiress figure in *Eliduc*, first sets eyes on the hero—and once again the action of looking is crucial, as it is through the eyes that love strikes:

Icele l'ad mut esgardé,
 Sun vis, sun cors e sun semblant;
 Dit en lui n'at mesavenant,
 Forment le prise en sun curage.
 Amurs i lance sun message,
 Que la somunt de lui amer. (300–5)²⁰

[She looked at him intensely, his face, his body, his whole appearance; she thought there was nothing unbecoming about him, and he impressed her *corage* [willed emotion] greatly. Love directed his messenger to her, and summoned her to love him.]

She goes on, in the best fashion of these romances, to lie awake all night and soliloquize about the love that has beset her, and in due course she tells Eliduc that she wants to marry him. In her case, of course, it is not a good move, as he turns out to be already married; but the lovers still manage a happy ending. More open to a charge of male narcissism would be the Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon* of Hue de Rotelande, written in the 1190s and translated three times into Middle English. Hue makes his acquaintance with the *Eneas* very obvious—he clearly wants his romance to be recognized as coming from the same generic mould—and his presentation of his heroine, La Fièvre, the proud maiden, owes quite a lot to the model of Lavine. She comes close, indeed, to being the central character of the entire story, given how much of it is devoted to her. She is more than an heiress, in that she has already come into her inheritance: orphaned as a child, she

has taken control over her own realm (of Calabria, part of the Norman kingdom of Sicily) at the age of fifteen. She has also announced that she will marry only the best knight in the world. Ipomedon, the young man who hears of her and comes to her court, seems completely useless in the chivalric stakes; yet she falls for him utterly, again through gazing. After she has gone to bed, she indulges in a long pillow soliloquy that is somewhat like Lavine's, beginning, in the fourteenth-century tail-rhyme version:

No thyng she slepyd all the nyght,
 But often turned and sadely syte; *sighed deeply*
 Her gerdyll waxit thyn,
 And sayd, "Dere God, wherefore and why
 And wethyr thou thus sodaynly
 To love hym schall begynne?" (908–13)

There follow a further 122 lines of soliloquy (even more in Hue's original), and concluding

Wyth hyr owne hertt thus she strave,
 That rest that nyght she cowde non haue. (1037–8)²¹

She, moreover, is only the first of a whole series of women to fall for him by *looking*. As in the case of Lavine, however, the very length and weight of these internal soliloquies, and (especially in the English versions of *Ipomedon*) the sympathy of tone for the women who speak them, resist a reading that is solely male-oriented. Hue envisages a mixed audience for his poem, furthermore, and so a response sympathetic to his heroines would have followed almost inevitably from the women among them. If the (presumably male) translators of the work into Middle English are anything to go by, with their heightened sympathy toward the women of the story, then male readers similarly took seriously the autonomy given its female characters.

Such sympathy for the loving woman is most fully displayed in English in a romance deriving from a French text written probably shortly after 1200, quite late, that is, for a French romance of a heroine who takes the initiative in love; it was, however, originally written for a female patron, the countess Yolent, though it was translated into English in the mid-fourteenth century for Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford from 1335/6 to 1361. This is *Guillaume de Palerne*, known in English as *William of Palerne*, *William and the Werewolf*, or, in the early sixteenth century, as *William and Melior*, with the heroine given a share in the title equalling the hero's. Sole child of the emperor of Rome, she falls in love with the foundling brought home by her father; and she too has a long pillow soliloquy in which she analyses her feelings. There is a leaf missing at the crucial point in the sole surviving manuscript of the English text, but it apparently ran to some

two hundred alliterative lines, considerably longer than its French original. What she concentrates on in the 140 lines that survive are the eyes (her acts of looking are italicized in the following extract), and how they have betrayed her heart:

“Prince is non his pere, ne in paradiys non aungel,
 as he semes *in mi sight*, so faire is that burne. *man*
 I have him portreide an paynted in mi hert withinne,
 That *he sittus in mi sight*, me thinkes, evermore . . .
 Theigh I winne with mi werk the worse evermore,
 so gret liking and love I have *that lud to bihold*, *man*
 that I have lever that love than lac al mi harmes . . .
 Whom schal I it wite but *mi wicked eyighen*, *blame*
that lad myn hert through loking this langour to drye?” *suffer*
 (443–6; 451–3; 458–9)²²

Other love-struck heroines, such as the Josian of *Bevis of Hamtoun*, have the excuse of being Saracen, and the Anglo-Norman *Boeve* is as much *chanson de geste* as romance (it is written in long-line *laisses* rather than the characteristic romance octosyllabics); Melior has no such excuses. Her own sense of being “al sterelees withinne a boot” culminates in an invocation to God:

“I sayle now in the see as schip boutte mast, *without*
 boutte anker or ore or ani semlyche sayle;
 but heigh hevene King to gode havene me sende,
 other laske me liif-daywes withinne a litel terme!” (567–70) *cut short*

And God does indeed show Himself to be on the side of the lovers.

Although Petrarch's lyric forebears may be the troubadours, then, some of the very earliest examples of the kind of love discourse that we now associate with Petrarchism occur in romances which themselves pre-date the great majority of surviving lyrics; and those discourses of love are devised for women—for Lavine, for Isolde. Succeeding romances, *Ipomedon* and *William of Palerne* among them, show themselves eager to follow where they have led. Lavine conforms especially closely to the male model now thought of as the norm for such discourse, since the processes by which she falls in love—at first sight, shot by the arrow of the god of love, buffeted by contradictory emotions—are so extensively used for male lovers in later literature. Although French romance had begun moving away from the dominance of such heroines by the end of the twelfth century, it is perhaps not until Guillaume de Lorris has his male lover shot by the God of Love in *The Roman de la Rose* that continental love-narrative decisively changes gender to give the man an absolute priority in falling in love, whilst

insular romance never abandons its readiness to center the experience of loving on the woman.

If all this is true—if it is women like La Fièvre/the Fere and Melior who dominate Middle English romance, women who take the initiative in love, who frankly desire the men they have chosen, and whose lengthy soliloquies are allowed to usurp the male text—why have we not noticed? Why is there still so much critical talk of women as either deeply suspect, or as not only chaste (and all of them are chaste, in the Shakespearean sense of passionately desiring only one man), but also silent and obedient, which these women palpably are not? Why are the writers of romance so consistently accused of treating women as commodities, objects of exchange whose voices and subjecthood are suppressed, when these women are so evidently capable of managing their own assets, and when their voices and their thought processes can run for hundreds of lines at a time, and when sometimes (not just in *Ipomedon* and *William of Palerne*, but also in others such as *Amadas et Ydoine* and *Partonope de Blois*), they threaten (or promise) to dominate the whole romance?

The answer, I suspect, is Chaucer. He is such a giant, so familiar—and familiar ever since he was writing, whereas these other romances largely disappeared from sight at least from the seventeenth century, many of them earlier—that as anglophone readers we take what he does as normative. We read the Middle Ages through him, and we take as the norm the conventions of love-narrative that he employs. And as that first *Canticus Troili* indicates, he uses a very different model from what was offered by the Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances. He goes directly to Petrarch for that song, to Boccaccio for his story outline and many of its details; and although the *Filostrato* was written before Petrarch's *Canzoniere* had set alight the flame of Petrarchism, the Florentine culture from which they both emerge is the same. Italian love-poetry was deeply influenced by the troubadours, and by French works including *Le Roman de la Rose* and the prose *Lancelot* (as Dante's Paolo and Francesca bear eloquent witness); but it largely bypassed the tradition that was most influential in England, of the passionate woman who takes the initiative in wooing and whose love is fiercely directed toward marriage and family. And it is the more recent French and Italian models, not the Anglo-French, that Chaucer uses for all his most notable lovers. The earliest evidence we have of his poetic activity may well be Fragment A of the *Romaunt of the Rose*—the fragment that translates Guillaume de Lorris's account of the male dreamer being shot by the God of Love. The lovers he takes over directly from Boccaccio inherit that tradition. Palamon, Arcite, and Troilus are all struck by the arrow of love when they gaze at someone who is unaware of their look.

In the *Knight's Tale* in particular, the outline of that process is remarkably similar to how Lavine falls in love with Eneas. All three lovers are shut up in a tower looking out; for all three, the person with whom they fall in love does not even know of their existence. In gender terms, however, there is an exact reversal, and that affects the course of the stories far more radically than a mere shift from hero to heroine. Emily is one of most passive lead women in all of medieval literature. Her only speech is a prayer that she may avoid sexual activity altogether, and the gods take no notice of that. She is represented as being as devoid of any power over her own life as she is devoid of economic status: she is merely a queen's younger sister, and she has correspondingly little power of choice or even, it seems, any volition of her own. Lavine knows from the start that the end and aim of her love is marriage, and it is she who sets about making sure that her chosen man knows it too. Criseyde does indeed look at Troilus from her own window, and her famous reaction ("Who yaf me drynke?" II.651) is the Isolde variant of being shot by the god of love; and she is furthermore given an extended interior monologue in response. Her thoughts, however, are very different from Isolde's, or Lavine's, or Petrarch's. They are not about being overwhelmed by love, and the confusion of emotion that it causes. Her confusion is much more pragmatic, much more about her options in a bewildering situation. The woman's gaze is always problematic in a way that the man's is not. It is a recognition of her desires, but it is also a reminder of how very different the situation of amorous women is from that of amorous men in how they can respond to such desire. Even the Lavines or Meliors of this world, with their high status and the strength of their love to encourage them, have to fight against social and cultural taboos, starting with the sheer physical restriction of their existence—that their space is domestic, while the man's is outside. For Criseyde, her difference from the gazing and loving man is even more marked. Her extended monologues after she has first gazed at her suitor as he rides home from battle have almost nothing in common with Troilus's responses, culminating in the *Canticus*, after he has first seen her. She is neither a high-ranking heiress nor the instigator of the affair. Far from having the confident sexuality of the women with extensive powers of economic patronage who have been actively smitten by love, or of the men who can pursue the objects of their desire through physical action, she hovers between anxiety and curiosity, a longing for security and the avoidance of scandal, and the glamour of being loved by a warrior prince.²³ The poem may explicitly protest, in Hector's voice, against "selling" women, using them as items of exchange (IV.182), but Criseyde's interiority is expressed as the consequence of being in precisely that position, and all her claims to autonomy are delusions. The loving women of the *Legend of Good*

Women are cast even more decisively as victims whose attempts at agency are denied.

We know frustratingly little about what Chaucer read in the way of Anglo-Norman. There were plenty of texts around, including romance texts: four of the five surviving manuscripts of the Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon* are of fourteenth-century date. It gets a mention in *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, which was probably written before any of the English translations was made, alongside other Anglo-Norman or French works not known to have existed in English versions.²⁴ Chaucer used Nicholas Trevet's *Chronicle* as the source for his story of Constance, which is poised generically between hagiography and romance, but none of the more secular romances served as the immediate original for any of his own narratives. A number of critics have argued that he knew Marie's *Lais*, but there is no hard evidence.²⁵ There is none the less one tiny fragment of verbal evidence that suggests he knew romances of this kind. This lies in the line from *Troilus* in which the lovers "entrechaungen hire rynges" (III.1368). The verb is very obviously French-derived (presumably by way of Anglo-Norman); the modern equivalent would be "exchange" or "interchange," though the shift from a French to a Latin root for the prefix makes these more formal in register. The use of words beginning with *entre-*, especially reflexive verbs (*s'entre-*), is centrally characteristic of French and Anglo-Norman romances that stress the mutuality of love, and that therefore typically make their ladies more than just passive recipients of adoration. So Marie de France describes how the lovers in *Eliduc* (Eliduc himself, and the proactive Guilliadun)

Lur anels d'or s'entrenchangerent
Et ducement s'entrebaiserent (701–2)

—literally, "they interchanged each other rings of gold, and sweetly interkissed each other." The most extreme example would be the lovers of Hue's *Ipomedon*, who on reaching the consummation of their love in marriage after their long-drawn-out courtship

se entreament tant par amur
ke il se entrefoutent tute jur

[loved and desired each other so much that they made love to each other
all day long.]²⁶

The *s'entre-*formula does not easily translate into English, and the Middle English substitutes a repeated "betwene them two" (as well as discreetly implying that the pair never leave off loving, rather than making love).

If Chaucer were looking for a phrase closer to the French formula, then, his “entrechaungeden hire ringes” is perhaps as close as it is possible to come.

There is of course another route by which Chaucer could have known of the active heroine, and that is through Middle English romance. Here the evidence is more positive, since he cites two such works in the course of *Sir Thopas*. *Horn Child* (presumably in a version close to that found in the Auchinleck Manuscript, which has a less proactive heroine than the earlier *King Horn*), and *Bevis of Hamtoun*. If this figure of the lovesick heroine is indeed an English convention, then *Sir Thopas*, Chaucer’s parody of contemporary Middle English romance, is where you would expect to find it. It does not figure in the main plot, where Sir Thopas falls for an elf-queen—and although fairies are commonly forward with their sexual favors, as in the near-contemporary *Sir Launfal*, Sir Thopas literally dreams this one up all for himself. The narrative does, however, open with an abundance of maidens who “moorne for hym paramour/Whan hem were bet to slepe” (*Canterbury Tales*, VII.743–4). We tend to assume that the line is funny not just because of its moralism but because of the gender reversal—lying awake is what men in love in romances typically do. In fact, it is funny because it is accurate.

There is just one other romance in the *Canterbury Tales* where Chaucer uses an English source, and that one too is suggestive in this context. This is the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, the story of the loathly lady who demands marriage from her chosen man whether he wants her or not. It is ostensibly a story about female sovereignty, about what women most desire. In practice, it is rather more about female autonomy, the woman’s freedom of choice, and in which her choice becomes a guarantee of her faithfulness. Like those other heroines, the hag gets the man she wants. Of that much-cited trio of feminine virtues, chastity, silence, and obedience, she promises the first only when she is granted that freedom to choose. As for silence—she spends a full quarter of the *Tale* in pillow talk, though here it is not a soliloquy of amorous self-analysis, but instruction of her husband in virtue and good breeding, true *gentilesse*. And she is obedient, not in promise, but in practice, and then only at the very end of the *Tale* when it can be represented as reciprocation for her having got her own way:

And she obeyed hym in every thyng
That myghte don hym plesaunce or likyng. (III(D), 1255–6)

Criticism since Sigmund Eisner has tended to associate the central motif of the *Tale* with Celtic allegories of territorial sovereignty, though Celtic scholars have pointed out the gap between ownership of land and the kind of personal dominance that interests the Wife, and the connection falls well

short of proof.²⁷ It is not possible to prove a connection with Lavine and her descendants either; but it is at least a thought-provoking parallel.

The story of the loathly lady is, however, designed very closely to be the Wife's *Tale*, and her voice is repeatedly audible in it. The romances that Chaucer wrote in his own voice were those of Palamon and Arcite, which according to the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* preexisted its assignment to the Knight as part of the Canterbury sequence, and Troilus. When it came to the discourses of love, Chaucer relegated women's active desire to a cultural sphere he classes as more popular. It is the desiring lover as modeled by Guillaume de Lorris, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—the male lover who offers a point of identification with the male poet—that provides him with the material from which the most ambitious, the most sophisticated, and the most cosmopolitan poetry can be made. Early romance had told a rather different story.

Notes

1. Reference to Chaucer throughout is to *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
2. From the Carlisle fragment of Thomas's *Tristan*, ed. and trans. Ian Short in *Early French Tristan Poems*, 2 vols., ed. Norris J. Lacy, Arthurian Archives I–II (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 2:175–183, lines 41–43, 49–52.
3. Petrarch himself denied such an accusation from Giacomo Colonna, though the denial too has been questioned: see Nicholas Mann, "Pétrarque et les Métamorphoses de Daphné," *Bulletin de l'association Guillaume Budé: Lettres d'humanité* 53 (1994): 382–403.
4. Introduction to *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 4.
5. For the difficulties of expression encountered by the women poets, the *trobairitz*, writing within this tradition, see Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 158–179.
6. *Eneas, roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. J.J. Salverda de Grave, CFMA 44, 62 (Paris: Champion, 1964, 1968), 8057–8061; translation mine, but see *Eneas: A Twelfth-Century French Romance*, trans. John A. Yunck (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 215.
7. *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*, B-text ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, 2nd edn. (London: Dent, 1995); they are described as the feathers on the arrows of a male Lechery.
8. For more extensive discussion of both maidens' and wives' faithfulness, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 218–307.

9. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210; her argument is a development from Claude Lévi-Strauss's work on the gift in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.
10. *Eneas*, ed. Salverda de Grave, 1.iv–v.
11. Erich Auerbach contrasts her, to the disadvantage of the Norman poet, with Ovid's Scylla, praising the fierce sexual passion of Scylla as against Lavine's "casuistry of love"; the proto-Petrarchism of the French emerges clearly from the contrast, though Auerbach does not comment on it (*Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 210–215).
12. See further Judith Weiss, "The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance," in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, Carol Meale and Jennifer Fellows (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 149–161; and Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 136–137. Weiss notes that women are often allowed to woo in some of the *chansons de geste*, but they do not do so with this degree of introspection.
13. See further John Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics in the Twelfth Century," reprinted in his *Richard Coeur de Lion: Kingship, Chivalry and War in the Twelfth Century* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 243–255, for an account of the historical consequences of these changes.
14. See Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 2.414–418 on the "courtesy of England" (also known as tenancy *per legem Angliae*), and 2.260–313 and 414–421 on heiresses more generally.
15. On the French "usurping reappropriation of woman" to remove some of their new economic power, see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 186–196.
16. His *Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936) notoriously claims adultery to be one of the four distinguishing features of courtly love, even though the examples he goes on to discuss include Criseyde.
17. Donald Maddox calls such women "mega-mothers": see his *Fictions of Identity in Medieval France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 172, 177–186.
18. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in her *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14–26; and Luce Irigaray on the problem of a woman's being imprisoned within the male gaze, "I am an object for your desire," in *Elemental Passions*, trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still (London: Athlone Press, 1992), p. 44. An interesting discussion of the converse direction of the gaze in the Middle Ages is given by Michael Camille in his chapter "She Looks at Him" in his

- The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Laurence King, 1998), pp. 34–39. Camille further notes that the only male body fully open to the female gaze is that of Christ. On the relationship between the gaze of both male and female characters and of the poet, see A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
19. Georges Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society," in his *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 112–122.
 20. *Eliduc*, in *Marie de France: Lais*, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford: Blackwell, 1944).
 21. *Ipomadon*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie, EETS o.s. 316 (2001).
 22. *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, ed. G.H.V. Bunt (Groeningen: Boema's Boekhuis, 1985).
 23. For a thoughtful discussion of the various kinds of gazing in *Troilus*, see Sarah Stanbury, "The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 13 (1991): 141–158.
 24. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. M.Y. Offord, EETS 246 (1959): 618; *Amadas et Ydoine* (mentioned at 614), does not have any known English translation, and those of *Generides* (620–621), like the Middle English *Ipomadon*, are thought to postdate the *Parlement*.
 25. For a summary listing of such arguments to 1981, see Lynn King Morris, *Chaucer Source and Analogue Criticism: A Cross-Referenced Guide* (New York and London: Garland, 1985), pp. 292–293; the list could be now considerably expanded.
 26. *Ipomedon: Poème de Hue de Rotelande*, ed. A.J. Holden, Bibliothèque française et romane 17 (Klincksieck: Paris, 1979), 10515–10516; compare *Ipomadon*, ed. Purdie, 8816–8825. *Par amur* implies sexual love; *entrefoutent* superficially invites a coarser translation than "made love," and Hue may well have intended to shock, but it is so hard to be sure of the register of the word in 1190s Anglo-Norman that it seems sensible to give the line the benefit of the doubt. On the language of mutual love, see also Cooper, *English Romance*, p. 239.
 27. See Sigmund Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder: A Source Study of the Wife of Bath's Tale* (Wexford: John English, 1957), and (for instance) J.K. Ballard, "Sovereignty and the Loathly Lady in English, Welsh and Irish," *Leeds Studies in English* 17 (1986): 41–59.

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CHAPTER 3

LOVE AND LOYALTY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

Corinne Saunders

Précis: *While Chaucer's writing demonstrates that English romance has the potential of portraying the extremes of fin amor, the genre does not tend to do so. This chapter considers the treatment of love in a range of Middle English romances, arguing that they demonstrate a special emphasis on mutuality and trouthe.*

Your yen two wol slee me sodenly;
I may the beautee of hem not sustene,
So woundeth hit thoroughout my herte kene.
Sin I fro Love escaped am so fat,
I never think to ben in his prison lene;
Sin I am free, I counte him not a bene.¹

There is no certain manuscript evidence that Chaucer wrote these lyrics, and yet their superb poise, beauty, and wit cannot but affirm that he was their author. It is not just the formal craft and elegance that persuade, but also the striking combination of haunting sadness with the humorous self-depiction of the narrator. The intersection of courtly artifice with realism, the blend of experience and authority, in many ways define Chaucer's originality; along with writers such as Gower and Langland, Chaucer was making of English poetry a newly sophisticated literary language. Yet it is not coincidental that he places himself as following in the footsteps of the great classical writers, or that French, Italian and classical works, rather than English ones, provide his chief inspiration. The abortive *Tale of Sir Thopas* clearly suggests Chaucer's mocking view of English metrical romance. In the triple roundel of "Merciles Beaute," Chaucer draws

conspicuously on the conventions of French courtly poetry. Yet in his characteristic balance of crafted courtliness with humor through the addition of the comic final lyric, perhaps we may see too Chaucer's debt to a more mixed, English tradition. By the period in which Chaucer was writing, Middle English romances can already reflect a desire to play with and infuse new life into convention, and hence a realism and social relevance that often involves a special focus on notions of *trouthe* or loyalty. This emphasis may particularly be seen in the ways that the romances treat love and gender relations—always a touchstone, if not the exclusive focus, of romance, but rarely the high-flown courtly subject matter we might expect.

The question of whether love is characterized in these works in some distinctively "English" way is problematized by the difficulty of generalizing about *fin amor* in medieval writing, and the critical debate which has surrounded the concept. The French scholar Gaston Paris (1883) identified a distinctive medieval mode of love, which he termed *amour courtois*; W.G. Dodd wrote on the English treatment of the phenomenon in *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower* (1913); and C.S. Lewis took up this notion with special reference to the thirteenth-century treatise of Andreas Capellanus, *De Amore*, to argue compellingly that medieval literature depicted "love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love"—though in its ideal form, this love would not be consummated, but would echo, for instance, Dante's sublime love for the celestial Beatrice.² For Lewis, the great medieval examples are Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Isolde, Troilus and Criseyde, and the celebration of such love is always shadowed by a sense of transience and human frailty.³

Lewis's role in illuminating the complexities and delicacies of medieval writing cannot be overestimated, but the difficulties with his theory are well known: particularly problematic is the notion of love as a fixed religion, despite the fact that Andreas Capellanus's rules of love were not widely circulated beyond male, clerical readers, and the insistence on adultery, causing the many depictions of married love in medieval literature to be dismissed as poor shadows of the real thing. E. Talbot Donaldson writes sceptically, "courtly love provides so attractive a setting from which to study an age much preoccupied with love that if it had not existed scholars would have found it convenient to construct it—which, as a matter of fact, they have, at least partially, done."⁴ Donaldson emphasizes the idiosyncrasy of Andreas Capellanus and the fact that *amour courtois* was not a current medieval term, and remarks the "spell" that Lewis's definition has cast on readers, obscuring the truth that "there is very little adultery" in medieval literature.⁵ The term *fin amor* seems preferable in that it implies a set of

courtly conventions without the fixity of Lewis's definition and with the possibility of marriage.⁶ Yet even this more fluid term can seem to indicate a defined set of attitudes, conventions, and rituals of love of a more fixed kind than the actuality of medieval, especially English, writing may suggest, and in particular, a more sustained, heightened treatment of emotion.

It is to twelfth-century writers such as Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, as well as the lyrics of the troubadours and *trouvères*, that the rarefied medieval treatment of love may be traced—although it undoubtedly finds its origins in classical poetry, in particular that of Ovid. Love typically takes the protagonist into a world of heightened emotional experience, so intense that he may lose all control of his reason, for, as Chrétien wrote, love and reason are always at war, “Reason . . . does not follow Love’s command” [“Reisons . . . d’Amors se part”].⁷ The irrationality born of great love can inspire the greatest deeds of prowess in war or single combat, or the single-handed undertaking of great adventure. Chrétien in *Le Chevalier de la Charette* recounts the emblematic episode of the Sword Bridge: urged on by love for Guinevere, Lancelot takes the most direct but also most dangerous path to rescue her from her abductor, a path that culminates in black, treacherous water crossed only by “a sharp and gleaming sword” [“une espee forbie et blanche”], with two lions at its end.⁸ Lancelot crosses, much wounded, but guided and healed by love, only to discover that the lions were illusory. In Lancelot, love-madness rather than reason underpins high chivalric achievements, and Chrétien plays with this pattern in different ways in both *Le Chevalier au Lion* and *Erec et Enide*, while *Cligés* offers a rather more satirical perspective. Marie de France too explores the complex balance of reason and passion in love, perhaps most strikingly in *Les Deux Amants*, where the lover, refusing the assistance of a magic potion, meets the challenge of climbing the mountain with his beloved in his arms through the strength inspired by her, only to die at the summit. Marie memorably characterizes great love as lacking in moderation through its very nature, though she is not unequivocal in her celebration of such emotion.

Chaucer’s Troilus too embodies the extreme experience of *fin amor*. Love afflicts him as a malady so extreme that, once betrayed by Criseyde, he is unrecognisable:

He ne et ne drank, for his malencolye,
 And ek from every compaignye he fledde;
 This was the life that al the tyme he ledde.
 He so defet was, that no manere man *disfigured*
 Unneth hym myghte knowen ther he wente;
 So was he lene, and therto pale and wan,
 And feble, that he walketh by potente. . . . (V.1216–22) *with a crutch*

Chaucer, like Marie, leaves us uncertain as to the good of this heightened, inevitable love, which, as the inscription on the gates in the *Parliament of Fowls* suggests, can be both infernal and paradisal—and it is not coincidental that Chaucer's narrators tend to draw back from love, or that in the *Parliament* the stories depicted on the walls of the temple of Venus are all tragic. Chrétien, Marie, and Chaucer all probe the rarefied extremes of emotion, illuminating both its inspirational and its destructive qualities, and opening out the subject of *fin amor* to explore complex philosophical questions.

Chaucer's writing, then, demonstrates that English romance has the potential of conveying the extremes of *fin amor*. However, the genre does not tend to do so. In part, this is the result of the very different context of Middle English romances from that of their French counterparts. English romancers were not developing a new genre, but using one that was highly developed, full of conventions and stereotypes, and extremely familiar in all its variations. An idealistic pattern based on the broad outlines of French romances such as those of Chrétien and Marie existed to be readily placed on almost every kind of material from historical to classical to Arthurian, and the earlier distinction between *roman d'aventure* and *roman courtois* was irrelevant. In that the fashionable romances read by the court were French, Middle English romance was not likely to be high-flown courtly romance. Susan Crane has argued persuasively that insular romance in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries was associated in particular with the baronial classes for whom French had become less accessible, and who were sympathetic to the slightly archaic ideals of romance; in the same way, the new bourgeois class, which could afford books and fuelled book production, would not have been seeking the high-flown French courtly mode so much as tales of popular idealism in English.⁹ It is, then, in this context that we must consider the portrayal of love in Middle English romance.

Two of the earliest extant Middle English romances, *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, establish a pattern of love in English romance as particularly associated with social order and with larger issues of loyalty and *trouthe*. Both romances also depict strong female figures, as do their Anglo-Norman sources. In each, love is set within the familiar context of exile and return, and in each the theme of love contributes to an important dynastic motif. *King Horn* (c. 1250) is summarily dismissed by one of its editors, Donald B. Sands, as having only the distinction of being the earliest extant English romance: "other distinctions, especially technical and aesthetic, are hard to come by."¹⁰ Yet this ignores both the powerful elaboration of folk motifs in the romance, and the remarkable portrayal of a wooing woman in Rymenhild. Rymenhild's passion for Horn is described in frank rather

than courtly terms, "Heo luvede so Horn child / That negh heo gan wexe wild"; she is startlingly direct, inviting Horn into her bedchamber and proposing to him.¹¹ On believing she must marry another man, Rymenhild is ready to stab him and herself with a knife she has hidden; a palmer recounts her distress at the wedding:

Ne mighte heo adrighe *suffer*
 That heo ne weop with ighe.
 Heo sede that heo nolde
 Ben y-spused with golde. (1043–46)

The description of Rymenhild's lament and her opposition to marriage to a man she does not love may perhaps be seen as offering a direct criticism of the tradition of arranged marriage, in contrast to marriage based on mutual consent and love.¹² The romance makes an explicit link between happy, consensual marriage and social order: it ends not only with the reunion of Horn and Rymenhild, but also with Horn's reclaiming of his own country and a reference to the welcome afforded him by his "kenne" (1530), the people of Sudenne. The establishment of social order and true kingship alongside the fulfilment of love are typical of the traditional romance movement from disorder to order, but here these are realized in very practical, social terms, terms of striking and active mutuality.

Havelok the Dane, written perhaps fifty years later, relies less on the ritualized or folk patterning of the genre but shares many of the emphases of *King Horn*. Whereas *King Horn* takes place in the timeless world of romance, marked only by vague hints at an English past when Viking raids threatened English kings, *Havelok* treats the historical period when England and Denmark coincided. Again the motif of forced marriage is prominent, and Goldborw's fear at her betrothal to an apparent "cherles sone" is, like Rymenhild's, acutely portrayed, suggesting again the woman's predicament in marriage:¹³

Sho was adrad for he [Godrich] so thrette,
 And durste nought the spusing lette; *prevent the wedding*
 But they hire likede swithe ille, *very badly*
 Sho thoughte it was Godes wille:
 God, that makes to growen the corn,
 Formede hire wimman to be born. (1163–68)

As in the case of *King Horn*, the love theme is interwoven with a narrative of the exile of a king's son, and *Havelok's* adventures prove him both as lover and as fit ruler of England. Again the work ends in marriage, the unifying of kingdoms, and the ordering of society under a good king, and

the focus on mutuality of desire and *trouthe* in love functions to promote that order. Neither romance treats love in elaborated, courtly, refined terms but rather as underpinning the hero's feats, particularly those undertaken to regain his kingdom, and as a necessary aspect of right rule, which should include the creation of a dynastic line through marriage, and hence assure the stability of kingship of a nation.

Against *King Horn* and *Havelok*, we may set the cluster of romances conventionally termed Breton lays, *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degarré* (both early fourteenth century), and *Sir Launfal* (later fourteenth century), which offer what is in many ways a very different treatment of love. All these works employ the motif of the encounter of human and otherworld, using either the pattern of the fairy mistress or the otherworldly rape or abduction. Yet in each we find again the emphasis on loyalty or *trouthe*, and on just rule and social order. In *Sir Launfal*, we also find the wooing woman, now a fairy figure, whereas in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degarré*, women function more as desired objects, perhaps reflecting changing views of female independence in the later Middle Ages, as laws of property shifted away from the possibility of inheritance by women to emphasize the notion of women as property of father or husband.

Sir Launfal is especially interesting in that it offers an English rewriting of Marie de France's *Lanval*, probably mediated through the early fourteenth-century *Sir Laundevale*; Thomas Chestre also seems to have used the lay of *Graelent* to expand his narrative.¹⁴ Whereas Marie's version finds its emotive power and fluidity in elegant understatement, Thomas gives his romance a complex three-part structure, employing considerable realistic detail in his treatment of otherworldly love. The narrative centers on the opposition of courtesy and ill-courtesy, symbolized by the giving and refusal of gifts; first the court and then the bourgeoisie, represented by the Mayor of Karlyoun, fail to reward Launfal's generosity, and poverty eventually forces even his two companions to depart within the year. Only the Mayor's daughter shows Launfal sympathy and, as he rides away, his flight is marked by failure and pain as he slips and falls from his horse. Yet in the transformative space of the forest, Launfal is summoned by the fairy Tryamour's maidens to her pavilion, where he is welcomed with open arms, "Launfal, my lemman swete, / Al my joye for the y lete, / Sweting paramour."¹⁵ Tryamour's beauty, the luxury of her pavilion, and the extravagance of the feast which she offers respond to Launfal's privation, and present an exotic otherworld that counters the harshness of Arthur's court. While Marie leaves the precise nature of this encounter vague, the English version adds the concrete explanation that Tryamour is the daughter of the King of Faery, and gives a detailed description of her gifts to Launfal. Tryamour's love for Launfal counters Guinevere's hatred of him, although

Tryamour herself is not undemanding in her demand of secrecy, and disaster occurs when Launfal's apparent lack of interest in love causes Guinevere to chastise him, her taunts finally goading him into his boast of Tryamour's existence. The narrative suddenly presents a more negative, violent picture of the fairy world, more closely approaching nightmare than love vision. Launfal's suffering is depicted in dramatically material terms: his servant and horse disappear, and his armour becomes as black as pitch. While in *Lanval* Tryamour simply disappears, here she is characterized as a harsh mistress, who wastes no time in punishing Launfal. Only when he is about to be put to death does Tryamour arrive to save him, her capacity for violence made explicit when she blinds Guinevere. Launfal rides off with Tryamour, never to be seen again:

Thus Launfal withouten fable,
That noble knight of the Rounde Table,
Was take in to fairie.
Sethe saw him in this lond no man . . . (1033–36)

In Marie's version, Lanval leaps up behind the lady on her palfrey, but Thomas depicts the servant Gyfre's arrival with Launfal's own horse, so that Launfal's departure from the court appears as an independent, measured choice.

Sir Launfal is most provocative in the criticism it offers of the Arthurian court, more usually characterized as the locus of idealism and excellence, and the place in which *finamor* is enacted. Here, love provides the means for the contrast between the failed ideals of the court and the perfection of an ideal otherworld. Tryamour's active desire allows Launfal to fulfil his destiny and to shape his chivalric identity. *Sir Launfal* reads in part as a critique of the knightly classes, presenting a chivalric ideal situated not in the human world of Arthur's court but in the mysterious world beyond—the sphere of the fairy mistress. This English Breton lay takes as its subject matter love and the marvellous, but deals too in realism and the material world, and in social criticism of an acute kind. Though its ethos is so different from that of *King Horn* or *Havelok*, it is striking that the work centers on an active, wooing woman, and on the testing of the hero's *trouthe* in love, as a key aspect of his chivalric identity.

Sir Orfeo is perhaps the most effective and sophisticated of the Middle English romances apart from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, although it occurs near the start of the tradition. *Sir Orfeo* is reminiscent of *King Horn* and *Havelok* in that, unlike its classical antecedents, it becomes the tale of a nation, with a subtext of government and rule, and, like *Sir Launfal*, it bears

a serious social message although its focus is otherworldly adventure. Its mechanism too is that of love lost and regained, but here human and fairy interact much more threateningly than in *Sir Launfal*, with the otherworldly abduction of Orfeo's queen. Heurodis wakes from her sleep under "a fair ympe-tree" to reveal a strange and threatening vision: she has been bidden to accompany the King of Faery to his world.¹⁶ The command is marked disturbingly by Heurodis's act of self-mutilation on awaking:

Ac as sone as she gan awake,
 She crid and lothly bere gan make; *hideous noise*
 Sche froted hir honden and hir feet, *rubbed*
 And crached hir visage—it bled wete. *scratched / profusely*
 Her riche robe hie all to—rett
 And was reveysed out of hir wit. (53–58) *transported*

The extraordinary violence of Heurodis's "taking" is made explicit in her madness and wounding; her only choice is between willing or enforced subjection to the King of Faery in this experience of living death:

" 'And yif thou makest us y-let, *to be hindered*
 Whar thou be, thou worst y-fet, *will be fetched*
 And to—tore thine limes all *torn apart*
 That nothing help thee no shall;
 And they thou best so to—torn, *though*
 Yete thou worst with us y-born.' " (145–50)

The question of the nature of the King of Faery's desire for Heurodis is intriguing—it is never portrayed as sexual desire but seems rather to draw on the classical tradition of the King of the Underworld, hunting human souls, and on a Christian folk tradition of the devil as a ghostly huntsman. In *Sir Orfeo*, however, the desire to possess not just souls but bodies seems to motivate the King of Faery to abduct Heurodis. The narrative consistently emphasises the body—the mutilation and taking of Heurodis's body, the bodies caught in the throes of violent death within the kingdom of fairy, the prey pursued by the fairy hunt—and the crucial dynamic seems to be that of the assertion of power by the otherworldly over the human world—most explicitly when Heurodis disappears even as Orfeo's knights watch: "Ac yete amiddes hem ful right / The Quen was oway y-twight, / With faery forth y—nome" (67–69). It is especially disturbing that this physical abduction only enacts that which has already occurred within Heurodis's psyche: she is already "taken" in her encounter with the otherworld as she sleeps under the ympe-tree; she wakes into madness and violence, and her disappearance simply sustains the destructive action of the King of Faery.

Orfeo, rather like Launfal, sets out not so much on a quest but on a voyage of grief and discovery, a consciously chosen exile:

“ . . . now ichave my queen y-lore,
 The fairest levedy that ever was bore.
 Never eft I nill no woman see.
 Into wilderness ichill te,
 And live ther ever-more
 With wilde bestes in holtes hore.” (185–90) *grey woods*

In a rewriting of the motif of mutual love, the pattern of Heurodis's disappearance is repeated in Orfeo's flight to the wilderness, and Orfeo consciously abandons his civilised veneer, becoming a “Wild Man” figure: he lives on fruit, roots, and grasses, his emaciated body is covered with black hair, and his shelter is a hollow tree. The wilderness or forest, the traditional literary landscape for the mad or grief-stricken lover, becomes the appropriate place for the expression of the extremity of Orfeo's grief; he sets aside his social role as king and pursues a conscious loss of identity that reflects his grief at the loss of Heurodis. Within the wilderness of the forest which he inhabits, only music, whose order opposes madness, represents Orfeo's link with order and civilization, and he tames the wild beasts, as he will finally “tame” the King of Faery, through his music. Orfeo's exile overtly parallels that of the hermit or recluse, and the poet emphasizes his conscious rejection of material wealth, comfort, and social status. It is appropriate that the wilderness, the place of the eremite, should take on a strangely redemptive quality: it becomes a place of miracle, where Orfeo does not seek Heurodis, but chances to see her, to find his way into the otherworld, and, ultimately, to regain her. At an unstated level, Orfeo appears as the object of grace: he is not a questing knight in search of adventure, but, as he lives out his life of withdrawal, fate is favorable to him, setting the fairy hunt in his way so that he may follow Heurodis to the otherworld.

The narrative is remarkable for the richness and detail of its portrayal of the otherworld: this is not the classical underworld but an earthly paradise, characterized by brightness, and it seems to be an ornate and rival city-court rather than an infernal world. At the same time, despite its apparently civilized quality, the violence of the earlier abduction of Heurodis is reiterated in the sinister description of the figures who inhabit the otherworld of fairy, all taken in different forms of violent death, madness, or sleep. The importance placed on words, the *trouthe* between Orfeo and the King of Faery, is reminiscent of that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and indeed these motifs of game-playing and the power of oaths are repeatedly associated with the otherworld in romance. Thus although the King of

Faery objects to giving a woman “lovesum withouten lack” (436) to a man who is “lene, rowe, and black” (435), he is required to abide by his own word and to approve the “sorry couple” (434) when Orfeo holds him to his word, “Yete were it a wele fouler thing / To here a lesing of thy mouthe!” (440–41). The result of the testing in the end, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, has been to illustrate the hero’s chivalric excellence and virtue, his *trouthe*.¹⁷

In the final section of the poem, it is this notion of *trouthe* that is further explored. Despite the emphasis on the menace and strangeness of the fairy and the profound emotions of love and loss, throughout the narrative we are made aware of the legal structures of human society. The taking of Heurodis becomes a formal, legal issue for the court, a public cause, the import of which is affirmed by the departure of the king. Orfeo hears the plight of Heurodis in a legal manner, and takes counsel from his courtiers, “When King Orfeo herd this cas, / ‘O we,’ quath he, ‘allas, allas! / . . . He asked conseil at ich man, / Ac no man him help no can’ ” (151–56). When Heurodis is snatched from the midst of those who guard her, the lament is a public one, “Tho was ther crying, wepe, and wo!” (171), and Orfeo’s grief is stated in legal terms, “Ther was non amendement” (176). Orfeo calls the court together formally for a second time to announce his departure: although “amendement” is impossible, he chooses to mark physically his loss of partner and queen through his renunciation of the kingship. This is publicly formalized when Orfeo places the guardianship of the kingdom in the hands of his steward, and decrees that the final outcome must follow the course of law, “. . . when ye understond that I be spent, / Make you than a parlement / And chese you a newe king” (191–93). The public, legal emphasis is sustained by the fact that the tale from the start works in terms of contracts, implicit and explicit—first between Heurodis and the King of Faery, so that she has no option but to wait under the ympe-tree rather than to escape; later, between Orfeo and his steward; and finally, between Orfeo and the King of Faery. The lay ends with the restoration of national order, “Now King Orfeo newe coround is / And his queen, Dame Herodis, / And lived long afterward, / And sethen was king the steward” (569–72). In addition to regaining his wife, Orfeo’s actions have effectively tried his successor, so that the order of kingship may be sustained after his death, not dynastically but through merit. The ethos of parliaments, laws, contracts, and loyalties, all emblemized by the *trouthe* lived out between Heurodis and Orfeo, points to the importance of the theme of order in the text, and the need for right rule based on *trouthe*. Once again, the theme of love is inextricably woven with that of social harmony.

Sir Degarré forms an intriguing counterpart to *Sir Launfal* and *Sir Orfeo*, in that it too describes an encounter of human and fairy, and once again sets

otherworldly, sexual desire against the *trouthe* of human love. The romance becomes a strange rewriting of the rape theme, ending, like *Sir Orfeo*, with the reassertion of social order and God's grace. The opening immediately establishes an ethos of marvel and fairy: "Knightes that were some time in londe / Ferli fele wolde fonde [*attempt*] / And sechen adventures bi night and dai": the reference to Brittany, "Litel Bretaygne", places the narrative as a Breton lay.¹⁸ The tale focuses at the start on the unnamed daughter of the king of Little Britain, who is separated from her company as she journeys through the forest to honor her mother's grave. As in *Sir Launfal*, the conventional details of the thick forest, the westward direction, and the unnatural sleep in the heat of the noonday sun hint at a supernatural intervention, and as the maiden wanders gathering flowers she sees a knight riding towards her, who appears handsome and "right curteis" (94) but in fact rapes her:

Tho no thing ne coude do she *then*
 But wep and criede and wolde fle;
 And he anon gan hire atholde *detain*
 And dide his wille, what he wolde. (109–12)

The violence of the rape is strangely illuminated by its contrast with the courtly language employed by the knight, who professes devotion in phrases very like those of Tryamour in *Sir Launfal*:

"Ilich have i-loved the mani a yer, *constantly*
 And now we beth us selve her;
 Thou best mi lemman ar thou go *will be*
 Wether the liketh wel or wo." (105–108)

The knight's otherworldly nature is affirmed in his statement that he will beget a child on the lady, and her emotions and fears upon discovering her pregnancy are poignantly described; it comes as something of a shock, therefore, that the product of the rape is Degarré, the hero of the romance. The perspective gradually shifts from the distress of the woman to the nobility of Degarré himself, and suddenly, the fairy knight is referred to as the lady's "lemman" (195), who sends her a pair of magical gloves from "fairi londe" (195), in order that she may later identify the child. The child Degarré is from the first depicted as unique in his chivalric excellence: he follows the archetypal pattern of the Fair Unknown, and even untutored and armed with only a sapling is able first to kill a dragon and then to keep his seat in a tournament against the king himself. It seems clear that Degarré's perfection and innate chivalric knowledge stem from his half-fairy, and therefore superhuman, nature. The conception of Degarré comes

to seem part of a providential plan and the fairy knight a force of destiny, a creature neither of God nor devil: rape is rewritten as love and authorized by Degarré's birth.

The disturbing undercurrents of sexual disorder, evident in an earlier reference to the lady's fear that her father will be accused of incest when her pregnancy is discovered, as well as in the rape itself, are reiterated in a bizarre oedipal incident, when Degarré wins the tournament and is betrothed to his own mother. The resulting discovery of his past triggers Degarré's quest for his identity, and specifically to discover the name of his father. It seems appropriate that the narrative of Degarré's chivalric exploits should include his rescue of a beautiful maiden from a "ravisser":

"He had i-loved me ful yore, *for a long time*
 Ac in herte nevere more
 Ne mighte ich lovie him ayein;
 But whenne he seghghe ther was no gein
 He was aboute with maistri *tried*
 For to ravisse me awi." (893–98)

Degarré's rescue of the maiden from ravishment may be seen as compensation for the crime of his father: structurally, the theme of rape is righted and the narrative replaces violence and disorder with love and consent. Appropriately, it is after this that father and son meet, and a final set of transformations occur as the fairy knight appears to be very much a human figure, who rejoices in finding his son. Degarré gains a father and an identity; the fairy and human are reunited; and the poem breaks off with the plan to reunite Degarré's father with his mother. The narrative's overt focus is the assertion of order and the achievements of the chivalric hero as he discovers and proves his identity, an important aspect of which is his role as lover and protector, but additionally the work seems to hint at the suppressed violence and disorder of sexuality. The pattern is one of wish-fulfilment in that the sexual violence of the start is replaced by the birth of a hero, and then by the *trouthe* of mutual love, but at the same time we are left uneasily aware of the ambiguity and force of desire.

Many of these emphases recur in the much more extended narrative of *Beves of Hamtoun* (early fourteenth century)—like *King Horn* and *Havelok*, a work with an Anglo-Norman source, and one that is distinctively English in its subject matter, with another strikingly active, wooing woman.¹⁹ The narrative probes the construction of gender and the intersection of love and virtue, particularly in the lady Josian. Rather as in *King Horn*, the traditional pattern of knight and lady is reversed, as Beves becomes the desired object, pursued by Josian, the daughter of the King of Ermonye. It is Beves, not

the lady, who withholds consent, accepting her hand only when she adopts Christianity. The narrative leaves us uncertain as to whether Josian's conversion immediately provokes Beves's desire for her, or whether Beves has previously proved his spiritual virtue by denying his physical desire, "for gode, that ich do nelle."²⁰ Although Beves's strength is not, like that of the Grail knights, dependent on his own virginity, he is repeatedly associated with the virginal and with purity, as in his dream that "a virgine / Him broughte out of al is pine" (2689–90), and in the episode of the virgin's well, in which the pure water heals and refreshes Beves in his battle against the dragon.

Josian's strength too is to a great extent rooted in her virtue: her chastity is active as well as symbolic, and she repeatedly transgresses conventional gender expectations in her enactment of love for Beves. She is startlingly assertive from her first encounter with Beves, defending his integrity against false accusations of treachery and reprimanding her father:

"Whan the child, that is so bold,
His owene tale hath itolde,
And thow wite the soth, aplight, *openly*
Who hath the wrong, who hath right,
Yef him his dom, that he schel haue,
Whather thow wilt him slen or saue!" (665–70)

Having singled Beves out as her "lemman . . . gent and fre" (707), she also cures his wounds with marvellous ointment and "riche bathes" (732). Her intellect and practical assertiveness are complemented by an evidently physical desire for Beves, which overcomes any concern for worldly goods: "Ne kepte y neuer more gode / Ne namore of al this worldes blisse, / Thanne Beues with loue o time te kisse" (766–8). Her words explicitly convey sexual desire: "Ichauede the leuer to me lemman, / The bodi in the scherte naked, / Than al the gold, that Crist hath maked, / And thow wost with me do the wille!" (1106–9). She openly demands Beves's love: "Beues, lemman, thin ore! / Ichaued loued the ful yore, / Sikerli can i no rede, / Boute thow me loue, icham dede, / And boutte thow with me do the wille" (1093–7). Perhaps Josian's loss of temper with Beves is her most endearing moment ("Beter be-come the iliche, / For to fowen an olde dicke [*clear out an old ditch*], / Thanne for to be dubbed knight" (1119–21)), though most radical within the terms of the narrative is her offer to convert to Christianity, "ich wile right now to mede / Min false godes al for-sake / And cristendom for the loue take!" (1194–6). Josian is placed as the "wooing woman" in a positive sense, in contrast to the frequently negative predatory women of romance:²¹ her desire for Beves is frankly confessed, but its purity and virtue

are proved by her wish to legitimize this in marriage, and her willingness to adopt Christianity, as well as her powers as a royal virgin. As Judith Weiss remarks with regard to the Anglo-Norman *Boeue*, Josian plays a central role in the romance structure, first orchestrating the marriage, and later founding a dynasty.²²

As in *Sir Degaré*, natural, consenting desire is contrasted with force and unnatural desire throughout the work. At the start, much is made of the unsuitable nature of the match between the older but honourable Sir Guy and Beves's mother, who wishes for a young lover, and who orchestrates Guy's death. Enforced marriage, contravening desire and will, is also repeatedly condemned: Brademund demonstrates his villainy by his wish to gain Josian through "meistrie" (912), "I schel winne hire in plein bataile" (920).²³ When Josian is forced by her father to accept marriage to king Yvor, the poet makes clear that this is against her will, "Tho Iosian wiste, she scholde be quen, / Hit was nought be hire wille, I wen" (1457–8). Here Josian's arts move further into the realm of the marvellous, as she preserves her virginity through a magic ring, a secular equivalent of divine intervention: miracle is rewritten so that the woman is the agent of her own protection. The preservation of Josian's virginity not only allows for her exercise of desire and choice in marriage, but also renders her an appropriate prize for Beves. The narrative emphasis on physical chastity and virtue sets up a series of hagiographical and biblical echoes, most overt in the episode of the earl Miles, who falls in love with Josian and abducts her. The pattern of miraculous preservation of virginity is dramatically repeated when Josian delays her violation by demanding that he legitimize his desire through marriage. Again, the assertion of will is the focus: "Miles wolde haue is wille / and she bed him holde stille" (3161–2). The episode clearly plays on the *Judith* story: Josian encourages her newly wed husband's revelry, and then, when they are alone, strangles Miles and hangs him by the curtain rail, in some versions with her own girdle, the emblem of her chastity. As in some hagiographic works, a strain of black humor runs through the episode: Miles complains, for instance, of the lack of servants in that he has never before had to remove his own shoes.

An emphasis on purity is maintained in the second part of the narrative, although Beves and Josian are now married, and we are offered an extended treatment of faithful, conjugal love. Particularly remarkable is the description of the birth of their sons, which takes place outside in the wild forest: Josian's chastity is asserted through her desire for "priuite" (3630) in childbirth, despite the solitariness and danger this occasions. Danger is realized in the capture of Josian for King Yvor by the giant Ascopart, who has betrayed his role as Beves's servant and reverted to his monstrous nature. Once again, however, despite her weakness after giving birth, Josian is able

to save herself, this time by eating a herb that produces a "foule mesel" (3688), a disfigurement that causes Yvor to reject her. The poet makes much of Josian's learned skill in medicine, perhaps thinking of the influential medical school at Salerno in his reference to her training by Italian and Spanish doctors: "While she was in Ermonie, / Bothe fysik and sirgirie / She hadde lerned of meisters grete / Of Boloyn the gras and of Tulete [Toledo], / That she knew erbes mani & fale / To make bothe boutte & bale" (3671-6). With her knowledge of herbs and potions, Josian becomes her own physician; subsequently, she also employs her art on the fiddle "to play / Staumpes, notes, garibles gay" (3908), and succeeds in approaching her ally Sir Saber disguised as a minstrel. Though Josian is rescued by Beves and his companions at several points in the narrative, she never becomes the vulnerable damsel in distress of romance. Her learning in the arts of medicine, magic, and music in a sense balance Beves's physical prowess, while both are marked by astuteness as well as courage.

Josian's identity complicates the traditional image of the desired lady of romance: her moral excellence and intellect are proved by her desire for Beves, her religious conversion and acts of charity, her ability to repel and defeat would-be-attackers, and her skill in medicine and music. Beves as male hero more predictably exceeds all others in strength. The testing of Beves's virtuous intention, the fact that his victory requires divine assistance as well as physical strength, and his restrained desire for a virgin, however, all contribute toward shaping an identity that goes beyond that of the characteristic romance hero defined by great physical prowess. Through these characterizations, this romance offers us a mutual and remarkably dynamic portrayal of love, which is placed throughout in the context of individual virtue, illuminated by contrast with villainy. This depiction of love forms an essential aspect of the larger picture of social order at both familial and national levels, and ultimately all these aspects of order coalesce to present an ideal of harmony throughout the Christian world.

None of these romances approaches the refined elegance of "Merciles Beaute." Yet to expect that they should is to misread their emphases. Middle English romances are rooted deep in folk tradition, treating enduring motifs such as exile and return, the fair unknown, and the encounter of human and fairy. They function as entertainment, providing moments of realism, comedy, and acute emotion, which span the gamut from Heurodis's infliction of madness on herself to Miles's unconscious jokes in *Beves*, and they perform this role with skill and originality, effecting variations on their traditional themes in sometimes surprising ways. Yet these texts also fulfil more serious functions in their treatment of profound questions relating to the practicalities and the experience of love, and in particular its

social impact and function. They open out too conventional ideas of gender and emotion, most strikingly in their presentations of active wooing women and faithful wives, but also in their probing of the unease, difficulty, and disorder of desire, as well as its delights. It is perhaps not far-fetched to see in their treatment of love some characteristic English balance of the fantastic and the actual, of convention and originality, of past and present, and of traditional idealism with radical thought.

Notes

1. "Merciles Beaute: A Triple Roundel," *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 659, ll.1–3, 27–29. All subsequent references to Chaucer's writings will be from this edition and will be cited by line number.
2. C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 2. See also *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).
3. See Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, pp. 42–43.
4. E. Talbot Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love" (1965), in *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 154–163 (p. 155). Peter L. Allen emphasizes the clerical, scholarly context of Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*: "Andreas's inscribed reader, 'Gualterius,' is a young man, and the history of the text's reception suggests that its public, for centuries, was essentially male," *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the "Romance of the Rose,"* University of Pennsylvania Press Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 59; on the reception of *De Amore*, see further Alfred Karnein, *De Amore in volkssprachlicher Literatur: Untersuchungen zur Andreas-Capellanus-Rezeption im Mittelalter und Renaissance, Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*, Beiheft 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985).
5. Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love," pp. 155–156.
6. For a sensitive treatment of "the social and emotional dimensions" of medieval marriage, which argues against the predominant association of love with adultery in the literature of the period, see Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100–1300* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), in particular pp. 1–32 (p. 1).
7. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, ed. Mario Roques, *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes III* (Paris: Champion, 1972), l. 365; trans. William W. Kibler, *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)*, in *Arthurian Romances* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 207–294 (p. 212).
8. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, l.3022; trans. Kibler, p. 244.
9. See Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
10. *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (1966; Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1986), p. 15.

11. *King Horn*, in *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Sands, pp. 17–54: ll. 255–256, 403–414. All subsequent references to *King Horn* will be cited by line number.
12. See further Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 198–199.
13. *Havelok the Dane*, in *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Sands, pp. 58–129: ll. 1092. All subsequent references to *Havelok* will be cited by line number. See further Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 199.
14. For further discussion of *Sir Launfal*, see Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 142–148.
15. *Sir Launfal*, in *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Sands, pp. 203–232: ll. 302–304. All subsequent references to *Sir Orfeo* will be cited by line number.
16. *Sir Orfeo*, in *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Sands, pp. 187–200: l. 46. All subsequent references to *Sir Orfeo* will be cited by line number. See further Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 228–233.
17. This interpretation is developed by Andrea G. Pisani Babich, “The Power of the Kingdom and the Ties That Bind in *Sir Orfeo*,” *Neophilologus* 82 (1988): 477–486. See also E.C. Ronquist, “The Powers of Poetry in *Sir Orfeo*,” *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 99–117.
18. *Sir Degarré*, in *Medieval English Romances*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt and Nicolas Jacobs, London Medieval and Renaissance Studies Series, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 57–88, ll. 1–3, 8. All subsequent references to *Sir Degarré* will be from this edition and will be cited by line number. Middle English characters have been modernized in accordance with editorial principles. For further discussion, see Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 213–218.
19. See further Corinne Saunders, “Desire, Will and Intention in *Sir Beves of Hamtoun*,” in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 29–42.
20. *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing, EETS, ES 46, 48, 65 (London: N. Trübner, 1885, 1886, 1894), 1. 1098. All subsequent references to *Beves* will be from this edition, Auchinleck MS, and will be cited by line number. Middle English characters have been modernized in accordance with editorial principles.
21. See Judith Weiss’s essay, “The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance,” *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991) pp. 149–161.
22. See Weiss, “The Wooing Woman,” pp. 153–154.
23. See also my discussion of Josian’s marriages in *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 199, 204–206.

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CHAPTER 4

“THE UNEQUAL SCALES OF LOVE”: LOVE AND SOCIAL CLASS IN ANDREAS CAPELLANUS’S *DE AMORE* AND SOME LATER TEXTS

John Scattergood

Précis: Andreas Capellanus claimed that “all are equal in love’s court.” But the hierarchical nature of medieval society meant that this precept regularly collided with ideas about social class and the desirability of forming relationships within one’s own social stratum. This chapter explores the way this paradox is handled in the *De Amore* and in a number of later texts.

I

Early literature is full of instances in which poets (usually male) complain of the unfairness of love, that they have not been treated according to their deserts. Gower’s Amans performs impeccably all the courtly rituals appropriate for a lover, only to be assured of the inappropriateness and folly of his actions because he is old. In *Envoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, both the poet and the addressee, evidently, have that disadvantage, and, in addition, are of unprepossessing appearance. Since they are “hoor and round of shap” it is likely that they will get no “mede” for their “labour” (31–33).¹ In 1619, Ben Jonson in *My Picture Left in Scotland* complains that his love poetry is not working as it should because the lady has realized that he is forty-seven years old, is gray-haired, and has a “mountain belly” and a “rocky face”—“And all these through her eyes have stopped her ears.”²

But along with such factors as age and unprepossessing appearance, the issue of social class was one of the potentially disabling factors which

negated the winning of love by desert. Love has very little to do with desert or justice, says Andreas Capellanus in *De Amore*, because he deals out his favors with unequal scales:

Sed quia inequale pensum sua solet manu gestare, de ipsius tanquam iudicis suspecti non ad plenum confido iustitia. (I. iv. 4)³

[But because the weights he bears in his hands are usually unevenly balanced, I have not full confidence in his justice, for I regard him as an untrustworthy judge.]

And, as he makes clear later when he uses the same image of unfairness (I. vi. 84; III. 113), this unfairness extends to social class. This essay is concerned with love and social class, and particularly with how the issue is treated in Andreas's somewhat neglected dialogues.

II

As has long been recognized, the *De Amore* was one of the seminal texts of the Middle Ages in relation to love, especially in relation to that aspect of love which we call *fin amor*. It has long been supposed that the text was written in 1174 at the court of Champagne, perhaps for Marie de Champagne herself, by Andreas, who is described variously in the manuscripts as a chaplain to the King of France, or to the Queen.⁴ But Alfred Karnein has argued that it originated in the 1180s in the chancellery of the King of France, Philip II Augustus.⁵ It is a stylish, highly intellectual, scholastic work, aware of classical literature, particularly Ovid, as well as twelfth-century discussions of love, and the ground-breaking love poetry of the troubadours. It is addressed to "Walter" and begins in analytical philosophical fashion but develops with imaginary literary dialogues, letters, quasi-legal love-cases on difficult points of the doctrine of love, and it ends with a ferocious palinode condemning the love that it has hitherto dealt with "in which scriptural admonition is reinforced with the misogyny of Juvenal, Jerome, and more recent commentators."⁶ It is a complex and problematic book, at once radical and conservative in relation to love and marriage in feudal society. One may suspect that there is a large element of intellectual play in it, that Andreas is trying on roles and positions, raising issues he knows are not amenable to any agreed solution.⁷ But what it does, undeniably, is open questions up for discussion and scrutiny.

The structure and the methodology employed in the first, and longest, book reveal that issues of inequality and possible unfairness are implicit in both the definition of love (*quid sit amor?*), the chapter dealing with "between what persons love can exist" (*inter quos possit esse amor*) and the

chapter on "the persons suited for love" (*quae personae sint aptae ad amorem*). In the opening chapter Andreas establishes that love is an "inborn suffering" (*passio . . . innata*) and that would-be lovers are fearful of all sorts of things including poverty and ugliness, and, even if a man is rich, previous parsimony may disable him (I. i. 4–5). Andreas urges Walter that one needs to spend money in the pursuit of love, but one must not spend too much, and he quotes a saying: "Non habet unde suum paupertas pascit amorem" (I. ii. 7) [If impoverished your condition, love then dies of malnutrition]. A little later it emerges that age is an obstacle: only males between fourteen and sixty are capable of love, and females between twelve and fifty. Blindness is also an obstacle, because love depends on sight—the feature of it, interestingly, which defeated Jonson. And so too is promiscuity, because the promiscuous are no better than animals: ". . . non vera quae rationis differentia nos a cuncti facit animalibus separari" (I. v. 8) [. . . they are not moved by man's true nature, which makes us distinct from all animals by the difference of reason]. He then turns, in a more positive vein, to the five means of winning love, "scilicet formae venustate, morum probitate, copiosa sermonis facundia, divitiarum abundantia et facili rei petitiæ concessionem" (I. vi. 1) [that is to say, by a handsome appearance, honesty of character, fluent and eloquent speech, abundant riches, and a readiness to grant what the other seeks]. Andreas does not think much of the last two, which he considers should be "expelled from the court of love" (*ab aula propulsandos amoris*), and he warns Walter against being too impressed by good looks "so that the empty beauty of women does not beguile you" (*ne inanis te decipiat mulierum forma*), but he has nothing but praise for "morum probitas" (I. vi. 11) [honesty of character] as a means of acquiring love, and he sees eloquence as a means to assisting the lover in making the case for his moral worth:

Ornatum etenim amantis eloquium amoris consuevit cinctare aculeos et de loquentis facit probitate praesumi. (I. vi. 16)

[The adorned language of a lover normally unleashes love's darts; it creates a good impression about the speaker's moral worth.]

In this view of things, women are to be persuaded to love through the power of language. And, in fact, his celebrated series of exemplary dialogues turn largely on issues of eloquence—because they are conducted in a manner in which verbal and logical skills are emphasized—and on "morum probitas," a phrase which recurs, meaning generally honesty of character or moral worth. The man's plea to the woman, in each case, is predicated on deserving: he argues that he ought to be loved because he is a person of worthiness, of probity, of honesty, of goodness, of achievement.

It is possible, as some have argued, that this part of the treatise is heavily ironized because the love that is being sought is extramarital and because Andreas later condemns it in forthright terms, but that is not how it reads: at this point Andreas is interested in how arguments are deployed, how language is used, in the intellectual battle of wills.

The dialogues are between men and women, commoners, nobles, and members of the higher nobility. They are not given names but are defined simply in terms of their social categories, and, as the treatise develops, social class emerges as probably the greatest impediment to love, in that it renders love between certain categories of people practically out of the question, though the arguments deployed seek to prove otherwise. The men in these dialogues are the wooers, who make their cases as best they can. The women are circumspect, skeptical, reluctant. They adduce arguments for not giving their love based on reason, common sense, and the social *status quo*. They hesitate and defer judgment. They sometimes use arguments based on the classical impediments, such as the female commoner's (*plebeia*) rejection of the male commoner's advances because of his age, though she otherwise recognizes his moral worth: "Quamvis multa sis probitate laudandus, ego tamen iuvenula veterum horresco solatia" (I. vi. 40) [I grant that you deserve praise for your abundant worth of character. But as a young girl I regard with repugnance the consolations of old men]. The man argues that old age is not a matter for reproach (*res improbanda*), because the aging process is part of the natural course of things, over which he has no control. On the contrary, the fact that he has lived a long time, he says, has enabled him to do more praiseworthy deeds, practice more courtesies, perform more services (41–43). But all this has little effect. And in the dialogue between the male commoner (*plebeius*) and the lady of the higher nobility, a countess, the issue of an unprepossessing appearance is adverted to, in this case flabby calves and big feet, which, she implies, have something to do with the fact that he is a commoner:

Quum enim milites es sua natura subtiles debeant suras habere atque prolixas modicumque pedem quasi artificio quodam per singulis dimensiones inequaliter pertractum, tuas in contrario suras aspicio grossas rotundeque intensas brevique tractu finiri, pedesve per singulas dimensiones equaliter et in immensam protractos. (I. vi. 140)

[Knights should be naturally endowed with slim long calves and neat feet whose length exceeds their width as if molded by a craftsman, but I observe your calves are on the contrary podgy, bulging, round, and stunted, and your feet are as broad as long, and gigantic to boot.]

The commoner argues that stereotyping of this sort by social class is unfair, because there are exceptions: he cites a king of Hungary who had bulging

legs and big feet. Moreover, he argues, the lady should, if she has any objection to him, object to his manners (*mores*), because by censuring his calves she is objecting to what God created (144). She admits that this is a good point, but is ultimately unmoved. Though it is accepted that lovers may have disadvantages which are not their fault, they remain as disadvantages.

Four of the eight dialogues turn largely on the issue of social class and love, and elsewhere it is implicitly an issue. The argument that class distinctions should not be an impediment to love is based on a number of points which recur. All are equal, it is urged, "for we are all sprung from the same stock in Adam" (112) (*ab eodem Adam stirpiter derivimur*). In love's army all are equal, because love constrains everybody without distinction:

. . . non excipians formam, non genus, neque sexum, neque sanguinis inaequalitatem distinguens, sed hoc solum discernens, an aliquis sit aptus ad amoris arma ferenda. (71)

[No exception is made of beauty, family, or sex; he does not heed differences of blood, being concerned solely with a person's competence to bear the arms of love.]

Love, which is all-powerful and unpredictable, transcends class distinctions and should be based solely on beauty and character, argues a man of the higher nobility, seeking to ingratiate himself with a *plebeia* (288). He pursues the argument by saying that people from every class are welcome in love's palace, and that love wishes all to serve in his court without thought of class-distinction or preference. Accordingly, "Plebeia . . . in amoris curia qualicum comite vel comitissa meruit ordine permanere" (289) [A common girl has the right to remain in the court of love with equal rank to a count or a countess]. "The recipient of a suit," one lover argues, "should not distinguish whether the suitor is from a noble or a common family" (*de nobili an de ignobili . . . genere*) (103). The criterion of judgment as to whether a suitor is worthy of love should depend on "good manners" and "abundant worth" (*bonis moribus . . . multa probitate*). One lover protests that "sola morum probitas compellat vos amare" (91) [worth of character alone should compel you to love]. In fact, manners, good behavior, moral worth, integrity, achievements, public service are said to be able to erase class-distinctions and can give a person from low origins the right, so runs the argument, to regard himself as part of a higher class:

. . . et sic me morum probitas intra nobilitas ordinem fecit esse repositum, et ideo nulla potest reputari praesumptio, si ex nobilitate mihi quaeram amorem eligere; magis enim ex moribus quam ex sanguine deprehenditur cuiusque nobilitas. (97)

[My honesty of character grants me a place in the ranks of the nobility. Hence it cannot be judged presumptuous if I seek to select a love from the nobility, since a man's nobility is measured more by his manners than by his blood.]

This is a large claim. As the language of this last sentence makes clear, the speaker is using the “*nobilitas virtus, non sanguis*” trope, the idea that true nobility derives from virtuous actions rather than from lineage,⁸ and is reapplying it, in a fairly unsubtle form, in the context of transgressing social hierarchies and the winning of love.

Though the female interlocutors sometimes admit to the justice of these arguments, they generally reassert the *status quo* in terms of hierarchical social distinctions and assume that lovers should be chosen from within one's own class. One woman of the lower class who is told by her lover, who is a *plebeius*, that her virtues make her noble rather archly replies that if that were the case she probably ought to seek a lover from among nobles not plebeians, and that he should confine himself to women of his own class (*aliquam de plebe tuo studias coniungere*, 34). Andreas tries to be even-handed in these debates, but in the section on a commoner's aspirations to the love of a lady of the higher nobility, he says, in his own words, that it is inconceivable to “any person of sense” that this suit could be successful (117). For such a woman it would be a “considerable disgrace” (*plurimum contumelium*) if she bestows her love on a commoner, unless there was nobody in the noble classes worthy of her love—which, Andreas makes plain, would be highly unlikely (118). And the dialogues themselves powerfully assert the importance of social class in relation to love and the problems involved in trying to transcend its divisions. The noble lady, approached by the *plebeius*, thinks it a cause of wonder that “such an upheaval of the social order” does not cause the “world to disintegrate” (*nec mundus corrui ipse*, 78). What she is saying, in a coded way, using the trope of “the world upside down,” is that such a love as he proposes is impossible.⁹ She listens to his arguments for his moral worth but is unmoved and thinks it an absurdity (*absurdum*) that, as she sees it, under cover of love, he is trying to make an argument for the erasure of social distinctions. He is evidently meant to be a member of the city bourgeoisie, one who makes a good living through trade, the wealth from which he spends generously. She sees him as having aspirations above his station, dismisses his arguments on both a literal and a metaphorical level, and reviles his livelihood because he pursues it in conjunction with love:

Ad hoc quod tuo congruentia ordini et honesta exerces mercimonia meo sermone non arguo, sed quia mercimoniis intendens nobilem tibi quaeris amicam, quod inconcinna res est et amara valde tristisque plena eventus.

Quod autem mercimonii lucra effluenter largiaris, hoc te facit tui ordinis feminae amore dignissimum. (109)

[In my statement I condemn you not for plying the honorable trade suited to your rank, but for trying to make a noblewoman your intimate whilst devoting yourself to trading. This is an unseemly, distasteful, highly unpropitious proceeding. Lavish distribution of your business profits will, however, make you most worthy of the love of a woman of your own rank.]

Naturally he does not accept this and continues to hope, but one wonders how realistically. Similarly, a lower-class woman, approached by a nobleman, says she does not consider his behavior apposite (*congruere*, 179) and questions whether he obtained the rank of nobility by merit (*ex meritis*) and wonders why he is not deserving of the love of a woman of his own rank (*tui ordinis*). And a female commoner, wooed by a man of the higher nobility, says that she must reject him on the twin grounds that it would ruin her reputation in her own class because she had transgressed the "due limits of my natural status" (*propriae naturae metas*, 292), and that he would be likely to be unfaithful to her anyway because noblemen are seldom faithful to a woman of a lower rank (*feminam ordinis inferioris*): it is the disparity of birth (*generis inequalitas*) which protects her. He replies with reassurances, but this wooing, like the others, ends inconclusively.

In fact, there is not much in the *De Amore* which encourages the view that love can be successfully pursued, outside strictly defined parameters. Poverty, old age, ugliness, and promiscuity are all seen as impediments, as well as social class. And, as the treatise develops, other exclusions besides these emerge. Same-sex love cannot exist because it is against nature. Love cannot exist between people married to each other because compliance with each other's desires is an obligation for them (397), and immoderate desire on the part of a man for his own wife is accounted adultery (383). Nor can one love a courtesan, because the agreement with her is based on gifts (I. xii. 1). Clerics are forbidden from loving (I. vii), though the man of the higher nobility sometimes speaks of himself as if he were a cleric. Nor should one pursue the love of nuns, though, as Andreas testifies from his own experience, they can be dangerously attractive (I. viii). Most of this is compatible with standard medieval teachings on the vice of lechery. Andreas's most striking exclusion, however, concerns peasants, whom he equates, more or less, with animals:

Dicimus enim vix contingere posse quod agricolae in amoris inveniantur curia militare, sed naturaliter sicut equus et mulus ad Veneris opera promoventur, quemadmodum impetus eie naturae demonstrat. (I. xi. 1)

[I maintain that farmers can scarcely ever be found serving in love's court. They are impelled to acts of love in the natural way like a horse or a mule, just as nature's pressure directs them.]

Later in the same chapter, notoriously, he recommends that force may be used in winning the compliance of peasant women, as may rough embraces (*violento . . . amplexu*, 3). But nothing illustrates better the culturally conditioned, essentially feudal cast of Andreas's thinking, than the reason why peasants should not be instructed in the arts of winning love:

. . . ipsos tamen in amoris doctrina non expedit erudire ne, dum actibus sibi naturaliter alienis intendunt, humana praedia, illorum solita fructificare labore, cultoris difectu nobis facta infructifera sentiamus. (2)

[. . . it is not appropriate to instruct them in love's teaching, in case we find, through their concentrating on behavior naturally alien to them, that men's estates which are normally harvested by their toil turn out unfruitful for us through negligence of the cultivator.]

There is a world of social discrimination, of cultural stereotyping, of institutionalized unfairness, in the personal pronoun *nobis*: the function of the peasant, in this ethos, is to work on the demesne estates of the *nobiles*, in order to provide the means of life "for us," so that the refinements of love can be pursued by those classes who are thereby exempted from labor. The love in which Andreas is interested is most appropriately to be found amongst the young, rich, and handsome, particularly amongst the noble classes, who are refined in behavior and sentiment, and who can devote themselves utterly to the pursuit of love without the distractions of having to make a living. And his propositions cast a long cultural shadow.

III

The recent researches of Alfred Karnein¹⁰ and Bruno Roy¹¹ have revealed that Andreas's book was widely copied, known, referred to, and discussed, though it was not always read in the same way. And the questions Andreas raises, including those about who is fitted to love and who is to be excluded, are taken up by later writers. In later writers, however, the ideas are discussed, without much distinction, in relation to courtship leading to marriage, as well as in relation to extramarital liaisons.

In *Le Roman de la Rose*, the paintings on the outside of the wall surrounding the garden of Pleasure, signifying what is to be excluded as inappropriate, include *Vielleice* (339) [Old Age] and *Povrete* (439) [Poverty].¹² The beautiful damsel Oiseuse [Idleness] gives the lover access to the garden which is owned by the rich young lord Deduit [Pleasure]. She explains the rationale of inclusion and exclusion (580–86). Because of her wealth she has nothing to do except attend to her appearance and enjoy herself. Deduit, who is "mignot" [charming] and "cointe" [elegant] imported trees from Alexander's lands, and, when the trees had grown, he surrounded them with a wall,

keeping outside anything that is not like him (*qui ne sont mignotes ne cointes*, 598), or anything that is "sad and mournful" (*dolereuses et tristes*, 599). The garden is not exclusively populated by young, handsome, wealthy, courtly lovers, but it exists for them. The other figures either aid L'Amant's quest for the Rose or seek to prevent it. They are sometimes socially marked, none more so than Dangier [Rebuff], who is described as a "peisant" (3653) and a "villain" (3682): he appears to be construed as a "hayward," a manorial servant charged with the upkeep of the hedges (see lines 3674–76). He is found asleep with his head on a heap of hay, but is told to get up and behave according to his true nature:

Il n'afiert pas a vostre non
 que vos faciez se anui non:
 soit Bel Acueil et franc et douz,
 et vos soiez fel et estouz
 et plains de rampone et d'outrage.
 Vilains qui est cortois enrage,
 ce oi dire en reprovier,
 ne l'en ne puet fere espervier
 en nule guise de buisart. (3677–85)

[It does not befit someone with your name to cause anything but distress; let Fair Welcome be open and gentle, you should be cruel and violent, insolent and offensive. A courtly churl talks nonsense, as I have heard in the proverb, and there is no way you can make a sparrowhawk out of a buzzard.]

This represents an interesting refraction of Andreas's remarks on peasants. Here, in order to do his job in protecting the Rose, the peasant Dangier has to behave according to his brusque and rough nature, and to eschew any sympathy with the "courtois." And with an analogy to hunting-birds, Honte [Shame] says that there is no point in trying to make a sparrowhawk out of a buzzard, a carrion-eater and a bird not used by medieval hawkers. And a number of later poems take up this issue, but rather more directly. In *Li Fablel dou Dieu d'Amours* the poet, in a dream, enters an orchard presided over by the god of Love: no "vileins" but only those who are "cortois" can enter. He hears a nightingale first sing of love and then of the degeneration of love, and asks for the question to be debated. The hawk says that love's degeneration is due to "vilaine gent" and that only knights and clerks should love. The thrush and the jay are more democratic, and after much debate the nightingale concedes victory to them. A number of later poems debate the issue of who makes the better lover, a knight or a clerk, but the issue of social class within the secular ranks is not raised.¹³ It does appear, however, in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. Though it is not the main topic of the birds' debate, the question is raised as the lower birds

get impatient with the niceties of the debate on *fin amor*. After the suggestion that "There been mo steris, God wot, than a payre," from the duck, one of the noble birds reproves him as follows:

"Now fy, cherl!" quod the gentil terselet,
 "Out of the donghil cam that word ful right." (596–97)

The two socially loaded terms *cherl* and *gentil*, and the mention of the farmyard *donghil* are more indicative than any amount of explanation might be.

The evidence suggests that the issue of love and social class was one which interested late medieval writers, but was something which they found difficult to handle. The standard teaching—enshrined in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, III prose 6, metre 6, *Le Roman de la Rose* 6511–62, 18577 ff., Dante's *Convivio*, IV and elsewhere—was clear: true nobility, worth, desert should depend on moral behavior, on good actions, on public service, not on lineage or rank.¹⁴ Though wealth and possessions may be passed down from one's ancestors, any virtues that they may have possessed die with them. On the other hand, there were the hierarchical realities of contemporary society, the powerful stratifications which governed much medieval life. And these ideas are memorably rehearsed, in relation to love, in Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, published in 1512 but perhaps written in the 1490s, where Lucres, faced with a choice of marrying Publius Cornelius, a wealthy Roman patrician of illustrious lineage, or Gayus Flaminius, a plebeian of some achievement, opts for the latter, who "by meane of hys vertue to honoure dothe aryse" (758).¹⁵

When the issues of love and social class are handled more generally in medieval literature it is largely in two genres—in romances or lays, or in pastourelles and *chansons d'aventure*. And the treatments are radically different.

In some romances and lays, the possibility of winning a lover, or, more usually, a wife, of a higher social status is a frequent theme. In some, such as *The Squire of Low Degree*, the hero has to prove himself worthy—in this case of the daughter of the King of Hungary. Her father has no objection to his daughter marrying someone such as this, if she loves him, and if he can prove himself worthy by achievement (369–80).¹⁶ He is given "golde and fee" and "strength of men" (481–82) to travel to tournaments and on crusade in order to make himself a knightly reputation, which he does and returns seven years later, to be rewarded with the king's daughter and the kingdom. After his return the king tells his daughter, who is under the impression that the squire is dead;

"... done he hath great chivalry,
 And come again he is to me.

In life and health ye shall him see.
 He shall you wedde, my doughter bright;
 I have him made squier and knight;
 He shall be a lorde of great renown
 And after me to were the crowne." (1054–60)

The squire, who had been a not particularly high-ranking household servant, is knighted because of his deeds of chivalry, and this enables him to be a more suitable match for the king's daughter. This was a common theme in romances.¹⁷ In other stories, where the social status of the lovers is very different, an unexpected revelation leads to a happy dénouement. In *Aucassin et Nicolette*, Aucassin, the young and handsome son of the elderly and ailing count Garin of Beaucaire, falls in love with Nicolette, a slave-girl bought from the Saracens by the *viconte* of the town.¹⁸ When he expresses a wish to marry her, Aucassin's father tells him of her history and assures him that she will be married to a suitable *bachelor*, who will provide for her, and he will be found a more suitable wife of higher social status (II. 31–35). Aucassin, unpersuaded, argues that her character is more than sufficient to make her worthy of the highest degree of nobility:

"S' ele estoit empereris de Colstentinonble u d'Alemaigne, u roine de France u d'Engleterre, si aroit asses pue en li, tant eest france et cortoise et de bon aire et entecie de toutes bones teces." (II. 38–41)

"[If she were the empress of Constantinople or Germany, or queen of France or England, her rank would be low enough, so noble is she and courteous, and well-mannered, and graced with all good graces.]"

Various attempts are made, by both families, to keep them apart, including imprisonment, but they contrive a variety of unlikely escapes, and eventually find each other. After a series of adventures, by turns plausible in terms of contemporary politics, and utterly surreal, they are enabled to be married with everyone's consent because Nicolette turns out to be the daughter of the King of Carthage. Some stories of this kind, such as Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, depend on magic for a resolution. Here the "loathly lady," as part of a bargain, has won an agreement to marry one of Arthur's knights, who is none too pleased about this on social grounds as well as on others. Citing three of the traditional impediments to love, he tells her,

"Thou art so loathly, and so oold also
 And therto comen of so lough a kynde . . ." (CT III(D), 1100–1101)

She preaches him a sermon on "gentilesse" that concludes with the position that "he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis" (1170), defends herself against

poverty by pointing out some of the virtues that can accrue from it (177–1206), and asks whether he would prefer to have her “foul and old” but faithful, or “yong and fair” and possibly unfaithful (1219–37). With the wisdom he has learned he puts the choice in her hands and is rewarded magically with a young and beautiful wife who vows to be “good and trewe” to him (1243). Chaucer addresses the social question by way of a comparison, not directly, but it is significant that he feels he has to address it. Equating beauty with rank, the woman tells the knight,

... but I to-morn so fair to seene
 As any lady, emperice, or queene,
 That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,
 Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest. (1245–48)

It is interesting that in another version of the “loathly lady” story, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, the lady who forces herself on Sir Gawain as his wife turns out to be the sister of a knight (475), so there is no great social inappropriateness, and furthermore, she explains, she was made ugly by her stepmother, “by nigramancy” (691).¹⁹ These are clearly wish fulfillment stories. Romances may have given back to their audiences their best view of themselves, but one wonders how much reality such egalitarian ideas had. In these stories, awkward social issues are diffused by distance and make believe.

Pastourelles look more realistic, because they often deal in harsh and unpleasant social realities in a lightly described rural background, but at the same time there is a large element of stereotyping both in terms of character and action. Characteristically, pastourelles involve a brief introduction followed by a reported confrontation which operates in class and gender terms: a knight, or sometimes a cleric, encounters, in her own context, a lower-class woman, typically a shepherdess, whom he tries to seduce. Sometimes he is successful. At other times he fails abjectly and ludicrously, sometimes because of a forthright or sarcastic refusal, sometimes because of the intervention of the woman’s family or friends who drive off the intrusive stranger.²⁰ At times, pastourelles appear to replay Andreas’s conversation between the man of the higher nobility and the female commoner. The woman’s fear of being ostracized by her family and immediate society, and of being subsequently abandoned by her fickle lover is clear from a stanza in *The Meeting in the Wood* from London, British Library MS Harley 2253:

“Such reed me myghte spacyche rewe *quickly*
 When al my ro were me atraht; *peace / me away*
 Sone thou woldest vachen an newe *acquire*
 Ant take another withinne nyte naht

Thenne mihti hongren on heowe, *family*
 In uch an hyrd ben hated ant forhaht, *household/ despised*
 Ant ben ycayred from alle that I kneowe, *separated*
 Ant bede clevyen ther Y hade claht. (29–36)²¹ *stick; embraced*

This no doubt reflects a social reality. But though such realities are implicit in the configuration of the genre, poets usually prefer to treat such encounters comedically, focusing on the disjunction between courtly language, the language of *fin amor*, and demotic, sometimes rather coarse, speech. At times they look at the assumption of courtly language by those who, in a sense, have no right to it. This seems to be what is principally at issue in Dunbar's *In Secreit Place*. This has a conventional *chanson d'aventure* opening which ushers in a dialogue wholly original in its linguistic configuration, but entirely predictable in the social attitudes it embodies:

In secreit place this hindir nycht *last*
 I hard ane bern say till a bricht:
 My hunny, my houp, hy hairt, my heill, *health*
 I haif bene lang your lufar leill
 And can of yow gett confort nane;
 How lang will ye with denger deill?
 Ye brek my hart, my bony ane.
 His bony berd was kemd and croppit *trimmed*
 Bot all with kaill it wes bedroppit *cabbage*
 And he wes townysche, peirt and gukkit. *foolish*
 He clappit fast, he kist, he chukkit *fondled; stroked*
 As with the glaikkis he wer ourgane— *sexual desire*
 Yit be his feiris he wald haif fukkit: *behavior*
 Ye brek my hairt, my bony ane. (1–14)²²

Dunbar, in his heartless and virtuoso manner, deploys in the opening stanza the language of *fin amor* to establish a set of expectations: the term *beryn* is an old-fashioned one and cues in a world of long ago; *bricht* is an adjective traditionally applied to ladies in medieval love poetry; the lover makes the traditional claim that he has served his lady for a long time and is *leill* and then makes the traditional complaint about the lady's *denger* [standoffishness]. But the second stanza brutally disrupts all this: the man is "of the town" rather than of the court, and immediate sexual gratification is his intention. As the poem develops, the man reveals that looking at the woman and being close to her give him an erection (34, 48). The woman is amenable to his advances, though he is unsophisticated and ugly (28 etc.), because, as she explains, she has not had a lover for a week (27). After a great many demotic endearments, the farmyard language of which may

suggest that the poem has a country setting, the transaction reaches a predictable conclusion. This, like most of Dunbar's poems, was probably written for the sophisticated court of James IV. What its sardonic humor suggests is that the language of *fin amor* belongs to the courtly intelligentsia, and that any use of it by other ranks of society is ludicrous.

IV

Writing of the courtly literature of the Middle Ages, Erich Auerbach says that its subject matter, themes, and conventions are "class-determined" and that it implies a "class solidarity" and exclusiveness. "Those outside this class cannot appear except as accessories, and even then generally in merely comic, grotesque, or despicable roles." He recognizes that, as the period wore on, "there were tendencies at work which sought to base the solidarity of the group not on descent but on personal factors, on noble behavior and refined manners," and he is aware that the arguments about true nobility being based on actions not lineage were often made polemically. But, he continues, "All this did not render the ideal less exclusive. It continued to apply to a class of the elect, which at times indeed seemed to constitute a secret society." Everything conspired, he argues, to separate courtliness from the practicalities and pressures of ordinary life. He goes on to say, "Courtly culture gives rise to the idea, which long remained a factor of considerable importance in Europe, that nobility, greatness, and intrinsic values have nothing in common with everyday reality . . ."²³ And when one looks at discussions of love and social class in the later Middle Ages, the power and perceptiveness of these generalizations become apparent. It is all very well to argue that all men should be regarded as equal because they descend from Adam and Eve, or that all are equal in love, or that love has the power to dissolve social distinctions, or that *morum probitas* should be the decisive factor in determining whether a person is worthy to be loved or not irrespective of social rank. But the realities of a feudal and hierarchical society were different, and such ideas were consigned to formal debates, or to stories of far away and long ago (Rome, Hungary), or were treated with uneasy laughter, or, sometimes, outright derision. Love, it seems, simply did weigh and distribute its favors with unequal scales, and there was very little that could be done about it.

And yet there are instances, precious because of their fewness, in which the ideas which Andreas had so radically proposed appear to have had some influence on behavior, and appear to have been taken seriously. In late 1476 and 1477 the Brews family of Norfolk were in contact with their more aggressive and richer neighbors the Pastons over a marriage between Margery Brews and John Paston III. The Pastons knew how to play the

marriage market and were only interested in matches which were advantageous to them financially and socially.²⁴ They strenuously and cruelly, though unsuccessfully, opposed the marriage between Margery Paston and Richard Calle, their chief bailiff, who clearly loved each other, simply because of his low status: as John Paston III picturesquely put it, he did not wish to see his sister selling candles and mustard in Framlingham market, where Calle's family were grocers.²⁵ John Paston III, who had already made five or six attempts to find a wife, wanted a large dowry for marrying Margery, which her father Sir Thomas Brews could not or would not provide. In February 1477, Margery sent John III a Valentine letter in which she talks in an intelligent and practical way about the dowry, and intersperses her prose with snatches of (not very good) verse which show that she has absorbed and can replicate the language of *fin amor*. After the conventional opening and inquiry about his health, she writes that she is ill and depressed because of lovesickness, a dying-for-love trope allied to the need for secrecy, though actually there was no secrecy at all about their wish to marry:

For ther wottys no creature what peyn that I endure,
And for to be dede I dare it not dyscure.²⁶

Then she talks more about the dowry, about her mother's efforts to get her father to increase it, and about her love for John III, a love which, she assures him, is not based on his wealth: "for if that ye hade not halfe the lyvelode that ye hafe, for to do the grettyst laboure that any woman on lyve myght, I wold not forsake yow"—and the offer to work to enhance his "lyvelode," in this ethos, should not be underestimated. And then more long-lined doggerel verse, which, nevertheless, conveys the paramount importance of love. She assures him of her loyalty, and, in a manner which would have pleased Andreas, of her capacity to resist social pressures and overcome the disapproval of her peers. It is necessary to treat this evidence with some care. Both the Brews family and the Pastons would have been regarded as "gentry," though there were considerable differences of wealth between them, so there is not a vast social disjunction, though some of the Paston family thought John III was throwing himself away on Margery. This letter, also, is written in the hand of Thomas Kela, a clerk of Sir Thomas Brews. Margery could write, in the sense that she could sign her name, but how well she could write is not known. Nor is it known whether or not she could read. But somehow, if these words are hers, and not Thomas Kela's, she has achieved access to the language of *fin amor* and can deploy it in an important personal situation, in which she feels her long-term happiness is at stake. The certainty of her love has given her confidence of her worth—in contrast to what society may judge—to be the match of John Paston III.

And the language of *fin amor* has given her a means to express that worth, a way of defining who she is, and what she feels: she is enabled by it, and empowered. There are not many instances in the Middle Ages when the power of love and the language of love managed to equalize the “unequal scales of love,” but this is one of them.

Notes

1. For quotations and references see *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
2. See *Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 324.
3. References are to *Andreas Capellanus On Love*, edited with an English translation by P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982).
4. See John F. Benton, “The Court of Champagne as a Literary Centre,” *Speculum* 36 (1961): 551–591 for a review of the evidence.
5. See “*De Amore*” in *Volkssprachlicher Literatur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1985), pp. 21–40 for a consideration of the author, place and date of composition.
6. See *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, p. 13.
7. On the tone of the book see the discerning article by Don A. Monson, ‘Andreas Capellanus and the Problem of Irony’, *Speculum* 63 (1988): 539–572.
8. For a history of this important idea see G. McGill Vogt, “Gleanings for the History of a Sentiment: Generositas Virtus, Non Sanguis,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 24 (1925): 102–125.
9. For the relationship between the trope of “the world upside down” and *impossibilia* see E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 94–98.
10. See his two-part article “La Réception du *De Amore* d’André le Chapelain au XIIIe Siècle,” *Romania* 102 (1981): 324–351, 501–542. See also the more comprehensive treatment in “*De Amore*” in *Volkssprachlicher Literatur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1985).
11. See “À la Recherche des Lecteurs Médiévaux du *De Amore* d’André le Chapelain,” *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 55.1 (1985): 45–73.
12. References are to *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1965–1970).
13. For these poems see *Les Débats du Clerc et du Chevalier*, ed. Charles Oulmont (Paris: Champion, 1911).
14. For a survey of some of these treatments, with particular reference to Chaucer, see A.J. Minnis, “From Medieval to Renaissance? Chaucer’s Position on Past Gentility,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 72 (1986): 205–246.
15. For the text see *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980).

16. See *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986) pp. 249–278.
17. For this theme in *Guy of Warwick*, for example, see Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Verse Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 224–225.
18. For a text see *Aucassin et Nicolette: Chantefable du XIIIe Siècle*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1969).
19. For the text see *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands, pp. 323–347.
20. For an excellent study of this genre see Michel Zink, *La Pastourelle: Poésie et Folklore au Moyen Age* (Paris: Bordas, 1972).
21. See *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS Harley 2253*, ed. G.L. Brook, 3rd edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), pp. 39–40 (No. 8). For the relationship of this poem to the sentiments of the *De Amore* see my essay “Courtliness in some Fourteenth-Century English Pastourelles” in *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 61–80.
22. See *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 40–42 (No. 13).
23. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 139–140.
24. On the Pastons and marriage see H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 27–41, and more recently Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 117–134.
25. See *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Part 1, ed. Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 541.
26. See *Paston Letters and Papers*, Part 1, pp. 662–663.

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CHAPTER 5

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE: LOVE IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING

Barry Windeatt

Précis: Challenging by the language of the emotions, Chaucer interrogates medieval stylizations of love in idiom and role-play across his works, and especially in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Love in a manner of speaking—variously exploiting or probing its own conventionality—is Chaucer’s mode of both celebrating and delimiting human love.

“If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?” (1.400–402)¹

To reinvent the more personal first lines of Petrarch’s sonnet—are his feelings love or not, and is this good or bad?—into these universal questionings that open *Troilus*’s first song is emblematic of how Chaucer’s most ambitious poem poses such questions more largely about the experience of love that is its theme. Yet, far from the puzzling and questioning effect of so much of the poem, twentieth-century criticism of *Troilus and Criseyde*—and of love as its subject—was strikingly monolithic and religious. Despite differences of emphasis, such criticism read much the same moralizing trajectory into the poem, whereby the love of *Troilus and Criseyde* is seen to become progressively subject to a moral critique, largely implicitly and ironically conveyed, and made explicit at last in the poem’s prayerful ending addressed to divine love.² This now-prevalent reading is driven by various imperatives of contemporary critical practice, but most pressing has been the modern literary-critical obsession with establishing unity in a text, in accordance with which the poem’s troublesome

otherworldly conclusion must be accommodated and integrated with the *Troilus* as a whole. The narrative as it unfolds has come to be read exclusively in the light of the ending—and not just the foreknown end of the story and love affair but its moralization at the close.³ How—so this reading goes—can a merely human love that succumbs to time, change, and circumstance stand up to comparison with a divine love that is by definition eternal, immutable, and steadfast? The backward panoramic vista that *Troilus* gains from the eighth sphere is itself an apt emblem of how modern criticism has interpreted the poem through a retrospect. With this hindsight *Troilus*'s love—focused on less than “love celestial” or even confounded with it—may appear only diminished and misdirected. Seen from this perspective, any representation of value in the love between *Troilus* and *Criseyde* is subject to irony, whereby foreknowledge of the love affair's eventual disintegration plays off against a sense of mismatch between style, form, and theme in the characters' manner of speaking about love. Such a retrospect blurs over sharp edges in the strain and irresolution of a project that interrogates too much to answer every question it poses about love.⁴ The poem's serene accomplishment in form and versification can also deflect attention from various signs of materials not fully worked through and assimilated, or of hesitancy and experimentation in theme.⁵ A broader impression of formal accomplishment is no proof that *Troilus* ever altogether resolves its debate about the relation between love and its stylization, which is love in a manner of speaking.

I

Another tradition of twentieth-century critical interpretation—of how *Troilus* relates to its principal source in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*—also works to limit modern understanding of how Chaucer writes about love. Differences between these two narrative poems are taken to show how Chaucer creates complex moral and philosophical implication from a relatively simple source, building a whole *summa* of love profane and divine out of Boccaccio's light tale of the amoral sensual pleasure in an extramarital affair. To this, a complementary assessment of the dynamic between *Troilus* and its source would celebrate no lesser achievement in how *Filostrato*'s avant-garde sophistication in addressing human love and sexuality challenges Chaucer to negotiate with it at every level, formal and thematic, in a negotiation no less fascinating for being finally irresolvable.⁶ To watch Chaucer working from *Filostrato* to *Troilus* is to see how defining what love is becomes intrinsic to the process of reading the English poem.⁷ This begins at the beginning with Chaucer's omission of the prose proem to *Filostrato*,

for absence of the framing devices provided by Boccaccio's proem removes explanations for the choice of this story and its action, which must therefore establish and define itself differently to the reader in Chaucer's version. *Filostrato's* proem turns on a *demande d'amour* puzzle which the poet recalls he used to debate with his companions.⁸ Which is preferable: to be able to see, talk, or think about one's lady? Too late, now his lady is absent, the poet realizes he was wrong to think the power of imagining is best, when he now understands all too clearly that it is being able to *see* the lady which is most important. This opening hence provides a pretext for a lyric narrative focused largely on Troilo's physical and emotional distance from Criseida: all his imagining and talking about his lady but not seeing her. By contrast, *Troilus* excludes any such prior personal justification for the story's focus, and readers are left to make sense of what may well seem an extravagantly languid narrative of sentiment, where much of the "action" amounts to the inaction of imagining and talking, yet not seeing. A consuming experience of falling and being in love is presented for itself. Never previously or subsequently in his writings does Chaucer, in an intrinsically humanist affirmation, allow experience so much space. Boccaccio's opening *demande d'amour* is not so much omitted from *Troilus* as internalized to its whole quizzical narrative of love.

In *Filostrato* the poem's lyrical narrative about a love affair, framed by its prose prologue and its concluding envoy to the poet's lady, is presented as if nested within a kind of covering letter, locating it to a place in the author's personal life with his lover. The "Filostrato" of the title—the one overwhelmed by love—is not only Troilo but the poet himself, who claims to have selected (actually, largely invented) the ancient story of Troilus and Criseyde as most suitable to represent in coded guise the love between the poet and his lady. Whether or not this authorial love affair is a fiction that frames a fiction, sending the text as a lover's gift is presented as a gambit in this relationship, and a boldly ambivalent gift. Some voyeuristic sense of peeping into a private exchange between lovers is made part of *Filostrato's* fabric of elegiac lyricism and erotic fantasy. Imagination is preferred in the opening *demande d'amour* because of a lover's pleasure in making his beloved in his imagination "accord with his desires and rendering her kind and responsive to them, even if such pleasure lasted only as long as the thought." Although there is some arch coyness about how the story only reflects the poet's own experience after Criseida's departure, and not in showing Troilo's earlier sexual possession of her, *Filostrato's* claim to lyric authenticity does involve the poet lover breaking courtly taboos of secrecy and concealment about his lady. Such pseudo-autobiographical authentication goes hand in hand with contemporaneity

and secularity. It is not the gods or the Muses on Parnassus, but the thought of his own lady, that the poet invokes as his inspiration in writing (1.1–2). The proem describes the poet walking the city streets in moping nostalgia, just as Troiolo will mope about Troy after Criseida's departure in Part 5.54–5 of *Filostrato* (the scene survives in *Troilus*, V.561–81, but lacks the autobiographical prequel). And when describing Troiolo's sufferings, the poet interrupts his narrative to insist that here he does not need his lady's inspiration, just his experience (4.23).

A key difference in Chaucer's reading of this love affair—and defining of love—lies therefore in the approach to experience, and the foreknowledge it gives. In *Filostrato* sexual experience is presumed, and so all experience is repetition, whereas in *Troilus* most of what happens comes newly upon Troilus with the force of revelation. The experienced *Filostrato* poet and his alter ego, the experienced Troiolo, give way to Chaucer's inexperienced Troilus, whose story is narrated by the familiar Chaucerian persona of an outsider to love, supposedly fascinated yet wary and diffident. Unlike *Filostrato*, Chaucer's first proem offers no personal explanation as to why this poet should choose as his subject "The double sorwe of Troilus . . . In lovyng, how his aventures fellen / Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.1–4). Through its bidding prayer formula, the *Troilus* proem invites the poem's lover-readers to think sympathetically and analytically about categories of experience in love, and implicitly to gauge Troilus's "unsely aventure" (I.35) in relation to these, with even a hint that hearing the Troilus story may help some lover "and his cause availle" (I.20). What was personally erotically encoded in *Filostrato* becomes historical and potentially exemplary in *Troilus* about love as a theme. With *Filostrato*, Chaucer rewrites a narrative in which experienced adults habitually take decisions and control their lives, and Boccaccio's poem is expressly informative about matters crucial to love, or lovers' attitudes and circumstances, where *Troilus* is designedly unforthcoming or indefinite. Boccaccio's Pandaro even acknowledges that the affair is inappropriate for Criseida, because (in a stanza omitted by Chaucer) such affairs are dishonorable for a lady (2.25), and nor is it fitting for Troiolo, because (again, in a stanza that does not survive into *Troilus*) it is not proper for him to pursue a love affair while Troy is at war (1.52).

What may have seemed most avant-garde in *Filostrato* to Chaucer is the unembarrassed candor and self-possession in how both Italian lovers talk about their desires. There linger about Criseida the associations of an affair with a woman of lower rank, such as Andreas Capellanus might have analyzed, where Chaucer endows his Criseyde with the household, lifestyle, manners, and reserve of a lady. Hearing that she has attracted a desirable admirer, Criseida at once assumes (before knowing his identity) that

Pandaro is suggesting that she sleep with this man (2.45). The speed with which Criseida succumbs to Pandaro's argument against wasting passing time suggests the essentially this-worldly fleshly preoccupations that weigh with her (2.55). And although many more lines in *Filostrato* are devoted to Troiolo than to Criseida, there is nonetheless some emphasis on how equal were their desires ("both burning with equal passion," 3.30). Criseida wishes she were "held tight in his sweet arms with my face against his!" (2.117), writes to Troiolo that "you could have me as yours far more than a thousand times" (2.127), and, as they lie in bed together, cannot describe the "burning desire that you've kindled in my breast, where I keep your image and where I'd like to have all of you always!" (3.67). By contrast, in *Troilus* the goal of intercourse remains unacknowledged until it happens, and yet its achievement is then presented more fully and uninhibitedly in *Troilus* than in *Filostrato*. Chaucer places at his narrative's mid-point a scene that, without prurience or embarrassment, implies the physical ecstasy of bodily love through Troilus's delighted exploration of Criseyde's body and hymns it through the lovers' exaltedly lyrical exchanges. Although Chaucer elides the Italian lovers' unillusioned candor before their union, the dynamic of their desire is reconfigured in *Troilus*, not only in the frankness of Chaucer's consummation scene but also subsequently in the acknowledged mutuality of their pleasure ("For ech of hem gan otheres lust obeye," III.1690), Criseyde's praise for Troilus's considerate sexual self-control ("And that youre resoun bridledde youre delit," IV.1678), and her unembarrassed suggestion that they take their troubles to bed, where "th'amourouse daunce" soon follows (IV.1243-4, 1430-1). Chaucer may censor Criseida's verbal explicitness, but he suggests his Criseyde has an autonomy and power that is perhaps greater in being less openly defined than Criseida's confidence which has challenged Chaucer to redefine it.

Yet if, in *Troilus*, the goal of intercourse remains unacknowledgeable until achieved, the effect is that the narrative's journey toward this unadmitted destination burgeons with extended debate about, and attempted definitions of, love. Indeed, this becomes a characterizing aspect of the texture of *Troilus* and shaped the poem's early reception and influence as something of a compendium of love-talking and theorizing. Chaucer reformulates love's implications by mapping the conduct of the affair through the conventional idiolect of the allegory and game of love. In comes love as a manner of speaking: love as feudal service, love as an art and craft in which to compose, love as a possibly fatal sickness and madness, love as a form of religious devotion and observance.⁹ Such motifs do not figure in *Filostrato* (apart from Criseida's obsession with secrecy and fear of disclosure), not least because they belong to the rhetoric of courtship, a

phase of love that Boccaccio's experienced lovers can skip. The major plot invention in *Troilus*—needed because Boccaccio's lovers simply arrange a meeting—is Chaucer's book-length sequence moving the affair forward from late in Book 2 to the verge of consummation. Here is a love intensely introverted and yet in a socialized context: a series of lovers' meetings snatched from an encompassing high society with its elegant round of lunch and supper parties. This whole section—from Troilus's first audience with his lady to his later kneeling at her bedside—is structured through the rituals of courtship, with the lover's sickness, his proffered service, and supposed near-death for love. In an influential essay, C.S. Lewis interpreted Chaucer as restoring traditional decencies abolished by Boccaccio's modernity. (Revealingly, Lewis ends with sneers and shudders at his own modernity, by aligning Boccaccio's approach to love with the work of D.H. Lawrence and Marie Stopes.)¹⁰ Yet Chaucer may rather be seen as drawing on convention in order to explore how love is both pursued through, and shaped by, stylization and conventionality. Although recurring across Chaucer's works as a mode of confirming lovers' values and aspirations (as the following pages will show), this conventional medieval idiolect of courtship—a literary analogue to the International Gothic Style in medieval visual culture—is so extended and elaborated in *Troilus* as to interrogate such stylizations of love. For readers today, the readiest point of comparison for this stylization of love is the construction of love in the movies. For just as fictionalizations of love in film have both mirrored and shaped modern imagination and experience—and have accumulated their unspoken conventions and intertextualities—so too medieval literary stylization of love has its pulp fiction and parody, its classic Hollywood (in some of the more stagey readings of courtly love), and also its equivalent of the allusive knowingness of the director's cut, all of which find their equivalents in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

II

In bed at last with his lady, Troilus addresses his lady's "eyen clere" as he kisses them, recalling the earlier moment when he was smitten with love:

It weren ye that wroughte me swich wo,
 Ye humble nettes of my lady deere!
 Though ther be mercy writen in youre cheere,
 God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!
 How koude ye withouten bond me bynde? (III.1354–8)

In revealingly bookish imagery of text and interpretation, the lady's manner and demeanor may be inscribed with the mercy the lover craves, but her expression ("cheere") is figured to be a kind of gloss or commentary, within which the essential meaning of the underlying text is hard for the lover to decode. The relation between the lady's meaning and manner, as between text and gloss, are alike challenges to interpretation. And when the lovers exchange rings—where an oath might be solemnly reified in a token—Troilus and Criseyde do so only in sportive mood ("And pleyngre entrechaungeden hire rynges, / Of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture," III.1368–9).¹¹ Transcription of any text inscribed on the rings is thus pointedly declared to be unavailable, whereas Criseyde's gift of a brooch in gold and blue (color of constancy), containing a heart-shaped ruby and pinned by her near Troilus's heart (1370–2) appears to be an equally textless but ostensibly less ambivalent token within love's manner of speaking.¹² No wonder the male lover figure of medieval literary tradition seems non-plussed here, posing as the humbly serving bondsman who seeks only the mercy of his lady, whose look is both potent yet demure, casting "humble nettes." Elided from Chaucer's version is the more active role Boccaccio here ascribes to his Criseida's eyes, imagined as capturing her not-unwilling lover and lighting his fire with the fiery arrows of her looks (3.36). Instead comes Troilus's sense of love as quandary and woe, in which the woman's power to bind is no less great for being baffling and metaphorical.

In Chaucer's conventionalizing depiction of lovers' experience is an emphasis both on how they determine to express themselves and yet how rarely such expression achieves its presumed aim of communicating their feelings to their lady. In the *Romaunt of the Rose*, Love's lengthy speech of counsel to the Lover is closely translated, so it is all the more striking that four extra lines of advice are inserted into the English version, recommending the lover to compose songs and complaints in order to move the lady's feelings to compassion ("Among eke, for thy lady sake, / Songes and complayntes that thou make, / For that wole meven in hir herte, / Whanne they reden of thy smerte," 2325–8). Even Chaucer's Aeneas, in wooing Dido, conforms to the medieval idea of lover as lyric artist ("... and songes wolde he make ... Sende hire lettres, tokens, broches, rynges," *LGW*, 1273–5). Recalling his as yet undeclared love for his lady the Man in Black remembers how "Algates songes thus I made / Of my felynge, myn herte to glade" (*BD*, 1171–2) and anthologizes into the poem the text of "My firste song." Lyric composition may characterize a lover, but his lady is still none the wiser about his feelings: "Ne telle hir durste I nat my thought" (1186). Eventually, after blurting out the single word "Mercy!" (1219), the Man in Black follows up with his humbly mumbled petition to his lady (1203ff.). The analogues to the *Franklin's Tale* begin with a married woman being loved by another

man: it is Chaucer who adds the more stereotypical touches that this lover is young (V(F), 933) and—before Aurelius declares himself to Dorigen—gives him the lover's conventional despair and related inability to express his suffering except in songs and complaints that the lady cannot hear:

He was despeyred; no thyng dorste he seye,
 Save in his songes somwhat wolde he wreye
 His wo, as in a general compleynyng;
 He seyde he lovede and was biloved no thyng.
 Of swich matere made he manye layes,
 Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes,
 How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle . . . (V(F), 943–49).

Like the Man in Black, Aurelius's songs are not the means by which he conveys his feelings to his lady: eventually he blurts out his love at a dance. This setting within a courtly pastime, taking place in a garden in May, is invented by Chaucer—in the analogues it is unnecessary as the lady is already aware of the lover's unwelcome attentions—so that love's indignant rebuff occurs in a setting archetypically identified with the pursuit of love. In the *Knight's Tale* Chaucer distils from a more diffuse sequence in *Teseida* the scene in which Arcite goes to a grove to do his "observaunce" to the month of May, sings a roundel, and utters a complaint, overheard by Palamon (I(A), 1497ff.). The observance of Maying ritual, the singing of a song to express his as yet undeclared love, are Chaucer's inventions, with the irony that it is to his rival and enemy that he communicates rather than to his lady. Once again, the lover's song does not actually deliver its message, but it serves to conform the lover's character to a conventional pattern. In *Filostrato* Troilo falls in love in the spring, but it is Chaucer who carefully plots the action in May, with Pandarus urging Criseyde to "don to May som observaunce" (II.112). When Chaucer resorts to Petrarch to provide an extended first song in which Troilus analyzes his feelings on first falling in love, this conforms with a larger pattern in Chaucer's accounts of lovers, as does his sorrowful realization that his lady does not hear his complaints. "Kan he wel speke of love?" asks Criseyde (II.503), and the protracted early sequences in which a humbled Troilus comes to confess his love and compose letters to his lady (guided in this, unlike in *Filostrato*, by Pandarus) is part of the way Chaucer's poem turns on questions of love in a manner of speaking.

Part of that manner lies in the way that love seems indivisible from its encodement in an idiom and role play of service, whereby the lover is cast as the lady's servant or feudal vassal. Troilus is only one of various heroes of classical antiquity reinvented by Chaucer as medieval servants of

love: Theseus kneels to Ariadne and proffers service until death as a page in her court (LGW, 2028, 2060–5), just as Arcite in the *Knight's Tale* serves in disguise as a page to Emelye, “my lady, whom I love and serve, / And evere shal til that myn herte sterve” (I(A), 1143–4). Such are the conventions aped in Absolom’s parodic courtship of Alisoun in the *Miller's Tale* (“And swoor he wolde been hir owene page,” I(A), 3376), not least because the role of servant can be adopted more for the lover’s sake, even in spite of the lady’s wishes: Chaucer’s short poem *A Complaint to his Lady* laments “That ye ne shul me from your servyce dryve / That I ne wil ay . . . Serve yow trewly” (91–3). By the same token, the functional idiom allows love to be dissembled by the insincere, as in the feigned observances of courtship-as-service recollected by the betrayed falcon in the *Squire's Tale* (V(F), 514–31). In contrast, where the role is played with sincerity, the lover constructs the lady as wielding power of life or death over him: the royal tercel in the *Parliament of Fowls* will always serve the formel, “Do what hire lest, to do me lyve or sterve” (420), and Criseyde has a moment of private exultation to herself “For who is that ne wolde hire glorifie, / To mowen swich a knyght don lyve or dye?” (II.1593–4). Against the sheer conventionality of how relations between lover and lady are modeled on service, a ceremonious formality and deliberateness to the role play of love as service makes *Troilus* stand out in Chaucer’s work. Both Troilus’s self-abasement as Criseyde’s vassal in his private thoughts (I.432–4), and his speech proffering his service when Criseyde visits his sickbed (III.127–47), reinvest convention with personal commitment, expressing that reversal of outward social power and position which his love gives his lady in their private emotional lives.

It is a convention that the lover views himself as a petitioner seeking for the “mercy” of his lady, a compassion that ultimately but always implicitly represents her concession of herself sexually. The Man in Black in the *Book of the Duchess* is reduced to a single blurted first entreaty to his lady for mercy (“I durste nat ones loke hir on, / For wit, maner, and al was goon. / I seyde ‘Mercy!’ and no more!” 1217–19), just as Troilus at his first meeting with his lady “With look down cast and humble iyolden chere, / Lo, the alderfirste word that hym asterte / Was, twyces, ‘Mercy, mercy, swete herte!’ ” (III.96–8). Indeed, the plea for mercy seems the conventional climax to a lover’s first petition, whether it is Aurelius ending his speech to Dorigen with “Have mercy, sweete . . .” (V(F), 978), the false Theseus insincerely closing his petition to Ariadne with “And mercy, lady! I can nat elles seye!” (LGW, 2073), or Damyan’s blurted “Mercy! . . .” in the *Merchant's Tale* (IV(E), 1942). The tragic pathos of the *Knight's Tale*—where any prior interchange between the lovers has been disallowed—plays on this convention by making the dying Arcite’s first and last words just such an

entreaty for mercy: "His laste word was 'Mercy, Emelye!'" (I(A), 2808). Such petitioning for mercy is part of the lover's self-vassalizing idiolect, positioning himself in relation to the lady in terms that profess an imbalance in emotional if not social power between them. In the *Parliament* the "royal tersel" speaks with "humble cheere" and bowed head "Unto my soverayn lady, and not my fere . . . / Besekynge hire of merci and of grace, / As she that is my lady sovereyne" (414–22), just as Prince Troilus declares himself (at least in his private imaginative world) to be the feudal "man" and servant of Criseyde. The lover's plea for mercy is to the lady's better nature, for his undeservingness can have no claim to compassion than that he loves her best, as the tercel or Troilus admit, and that he is in great pain. Arveragus won Dorigen's hand when she "Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce" (V(F), 740), and Aurelius begs Dorigen, "Madame, reweth upon my peynes smerte" (974), while Aeneas deceives Dido into pitying him ("And as a fals love so wel can pleyne, / That sely Dido rewede on his peyne," *LGW*, 1236–7). Such pleas for mercy become a measure of the lover's power of pleading, and hence power more generally. In the *Miller's Tale*, when "This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye, / And spak so faire, and profred him so faste" (I(A), 3288–9), the conventional entreaty for the lady's pity is on fast forward, where in the *Merchant's Tale* uncourtly conduct rings hollow beneath the worldwarily conventional idiom ("But there I lete hym wepe ynogh and pleyne / Til fresshe May wol rewen on his peyne," IV(E), 1781–2). More central to tradition is the lover's sense of his rhetorical inadequacy to complain skillfully enough to win mercy, as in Chaucer's short poem *The Complaint unto Pity* ("And though I be not konnyng for to pleyne, / For Goddis love have mercy on my peyne," 97–8), and this is the stance that Troilus adopts in his first letter to Criseyde ("And pitousli gan mercy for to crye . . . And that she sholde han his konnyng excused," II.1076–9).

Behind courtly supplication for the lady's mercy lies Christian understanding of the Redemption, in which the merciful love exemplified in Christ transcends what may be deserved in strict justice. "Here may men seen that mercy passeth right!" (III.1282) is how pagan Troilus applies this to his own sense of good fortune in love, but when the maxim is repeated in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* it is significantly expanded to emphasize not only mercy's power but also how it is merited both "Thurgh innocence and ruled Curtesye" (F 163), pairing innocence with a self-controlled courtliness. Within such a reading of courtly mercy it becomes unsurprising that the Man in Black comforted himself as a suitor "that Nature / Ne formed never in creature / So moche beaute, trewely, / And bounte, wythoute mercy" (1195–8). This is the context for Pandarus to comfort Troilus "That sith thy lady vertuous is al, / So foloweth it that there is some pitee" (I.898–9) amongst all her other virtues. Although

Pandarus here replaces Pandaro's warning in *Filostrato* that Criseida's concern for reputation will make her resistant (2.23), the prospect of such mercy remains at some remove. Courtly mercy is bound up with honor: the Man in Black remembers how his lady gave him the gift of her mercy "Savyng hir worship by al weyes—/ Dredles, I mene noon other weyes" (1271–2), just as the female falcon in the *Squire's Tale* recalls how "my wyl obeyed his wyl / In alle thyng, as fer as reson fil, / Kepyng the boundes of my worshiþe evere" (V(F), 569–71). This is the context for the elevated idiom in which Criseyde responds to Troilus's plea "Have mercy, swete herte myn, Criseyde!" (III.1173) in terms redolent of the religious language of forgiveness, but which she needs to gloss: "And she answerde, 'Of gilt misericode! / That is to seyn, that I foryeve al this' " (III.1177–8).

Compassion for the lover sick with love as an illness is another convention, and one where Chaucer recurrently conforms his lovers to the stereotype.¹³ For "Two yeer and moore" (V(F), 1102) Aurelius takes to his bed with a love sickness explicitly likened to the suffering of some archetypal lovers from a famous literary text, *Pamphilus de Amore* (1109–10). From their languishings in love both Aurelius and Troilus have to be rescued by the friendly intervention of a male peer with initiative (whereas in the *Franklin's Tale* analogues the lover figure promptly sets off to find for himself a way of fulfilling the lady's supposedly impossible demand, and in *Filostrato*, Pandaro's role is much more limited than Pandarus's). In *Teseida*, Arcita does suffer some of the lover's usual physical symptoms—sleeplessness, lack of appetite, weight loss—but it is in the *Knight's Tale* that Chaucer collects Arcite's symptoms together into a diagnosis of his medical condition labeled as a sufferer from love sickness "Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye / Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye" (I(A), 1373–4). For the sick or wounded lover the lady is cast in the role of healer ("And but your word wol helen hastily / My hertes wounde . . ." *Merciles Beaute*, 4–5) or indeed of physician, as when Criseyde thinks to herself during a discussion of Troilus's illness, "Best koud I yet ben his leche" (II.1582). She will shortly afterward visit the bedside of her lovesick lover who is feigning another illness as a pretext, and the comic delicacy of this scene appears only the more refined by comparison with the ironic play on conventions when May visits the bedside of Damyan, supposedly a victim of a mysterious illness "And bad hym been al hool" (IV(E), 2007). Conventional courtly obliqueness and indirection about precisely how a lady cures her lover's sickness is confronted when the previously sick Damyan, now assured that May will have sex with him, already feels cured ("Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe," 2010).

Lovesickness is customarily taken seriously as a possibly fatal condition, within a courtly convention whereby the intensity of love's experience and

pain are likened to dying: in the *Knight's Tale* Arcite exclaims, "The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly / Of hire" (I(A), 1118–19); Mars declares, "For this day in her servise shal I dye" (*Complaint of Mars*, 189); in *Anelida* Arcite "swor he wolde dyen for distresse" (101) and the Queen laments, "Myself I mordre with my privy thoght" (291). When Aurelius begs Dorigen for mercy "or ye wol do me deye!" (V(F), 978), he draws on a manner of speaking that is burlesqued in Nicholas's travesty of courtship ("but if ich have my wille, / For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille!" I(A), 3277–8), or mocked when May is archly congratulated for not resembling those tyrannical ladies who let their lovers "sterven in the place . . . / And rekke nat to been an homycide" (IV(E), 1989–94). By admitting the usually unacknowledged centrality of the male lover's own will and pleasure, Nicholas brushes aside one of the unspoken rules of love's game of pretences. Another is that uncomplaining lovers only utter complaints because confronted with a choice between the two silences of not speaking or dying: Aurelius declares, "Noght wolde I telle how me is wo bigon: / But certes outhere moste I dye or pleyne" (V(F), 1316–17). When Pandarus entreats Criseyde to save the madly jealous Troilus by agreeing to receive him, and when he explains that Troilus will not complain about his affliction (III.891–907), the go-between is drawing on a conventional understanding of what these ways of speaking and behaving represent. It is in this context that the manner of speaking in *Troilus* about dying for love may be interpreted, not least the characters' seeming readiness to take such rhetoric at face value: the female falcon in the *Squire's Tale* recollects how she took pity on her false-hearted lover because she was very frightened that he might die (V(F), 527), and the Man in Black eulogizes his lady's kindness in thinking, "And pitee were I shulde sterve" (1266).

As an escape from dying for love, the religious language of grace and salvation implies a heaven of coming fulfillment, which the lady with her quasi-divine powers may grant or withhold. When lines from the *Filostrato* prologue on his lady as the poet's muse are relocated to the *Prologue* to the *Legend*, Chaucer adds his remarkable invocation to the lady as a kind of divinity ("Be ye my gide and lady sovereyne! / As to myn erthly god to yow I calle," F 94–5). When adapting *Teseida* for the scene where Palamoun and Arcite fall in love with Emelye, Chaucer invents a *demande d'amour* out of the lovers' propensity to view their lady as a divinity. In *Teseida* both the rival lovers are equally unsure whether Emelia is actually an apparition of the goddess Venus, whereas Chaucer makes it a point of dispute between them. Chaucer's Palamoun is uncertain whether Emelye "be womman or goddess" (I(A), 1101–2), but Arcite declares himself to love her by way of passionate love as a man ("paramour," 1155), deriding Palamoun's religion of love: "Thyn is affecciou of hoolynesse, / And myn

is love as to a creature" (1158–9). In lines added to *Filostrato*, Pandarus distinguishes earthly love "of kynde" from "love celestial" (I.976–80), suggesting the latter is inappropriate for Criseyde "As yet," although Troilus's own love becomes pervasively "celestial" in his manner of speaking.

III

A key question for love in a manner of speaking in *Troilus* is whether the idiom of the religion of love—as used by the characters or the narrator—is to be interpreted as part of an ironical critique of earthly love. Is it to be read as a misappropriation that conveys by irony the lovers' or narrator's mistaken overvaluation of their love, and hence points forward to the disengagement of the poem's conclusion? If the lovers' union is hailed as "O blisful nyght" (III.1317) and "this hevene blisse . . . That is so heigh that al ne kan I telle" (III.1322–3), or if Troilus thanks Pandarus afterward because "Thow hast in hevene ybrought my soule at reste" (1599), it is certainly possible to cite other fourteenth-century English voices who contest such language from an otherworldly perspective, as Richard Rolle does in his *Incendium Amoris*:

There is nothing more dangerous, more degrading, more disgusting than that a man should exhaust his mind in love for a woman, and pant after her as if she were his "blessed rest" [*beatam requiem*]. And after it is all over, small wonder that he begins to degenerate, because before it had happened he had striven for this "supreme blessedness" [*summe beatitudine*] with such great anguish. (ch. 24)¹⁴

Yet a reading such as Rolle's might not be the only interpretation of a text where love's morally improving effect upon the lover is recurrently recorded. At the ends of the first and third books Troilus's moral character is reported to have improved as a consequence of being in love, a transformation witnessed by people in Troy generally (I.1079–85; III.1786–1806), and Criseyde's joy in the lovers' intuitive mutual understanding (III. 465–9) recognizes something humanly invaluable in an idiom that matches its theme in calm collectedness ("For which she thought that love, al come it late, / Of alle joie hadde opned hire the yate . . .").

It is Chaucer's design that the third book opens with a proem to Venus (to create it, Chaucer brings forward the first six and best stanzas of Troilo's rambling sixteen-stanza song at the close of *Filostrato*, Part 3) and closes with Troilus's Boethian song to love as a cosmic unifying force. Venus could never be other than ambivalent, yet this third proem, while alert to her sensual and disruptive possibility, reads largely as a celebration of Venus as a force for cosmic harmony and order, with much less that is questionable than is positive. Here is a Venus who is "In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire" (III.5).

In *Filostrato* Troilo praised her as a source of well-being and power (3.74), but the *Troilus* proem celebrates Venus for her “heelee” and “gladnesse” and for her “might” and her “goodnesse” (III.6–7). Most strikingly of all, Chaucer’s proem includes the following new lines by way of prologue to a third book that includes the scene of the lovers’ physical union:

God loveth, and to love wol nought werne,
 And in this world no lyves creature
 Withouten love is worth, or may endure (III.12–14)

Is Troilus’s religious idiom during that scene to be read as misguidedness and blasphemy? Is his address to Love as “Charite” (III.1254)—a love aligned in the next line with Cupid, son of Venus—to be understood as a pagan’s confounding of earthly love with “love celestial”? Would the same interpretation hold for his address to love in lines borrowed from St. Bernard’s prayer to the Virgin in Dante’s *Paradiso* (33.14–18), where Mary is celebrated for her grace that far surpasses any claims based on our deservingness (“Whoso wol grace and list the nought honouren . . . / But if thy grace passed oure desertes . . .” III.1262–7)? Any medieval reader might ponder the appropriation of the Marian language of grace, even if few indeed of Chaucer’s contemporaries were in a position to make comparison with the Dantean context.¹⁵ Given that Troilus is a Trojan pagan, without access to Christian revelation, yet also a fundamentally virtuous pagan (or he could scarcely merit his final apotheosis), his idiom may rather be interpreted as exploiting contemporary religious language to express the sense of humility that Troilus feels before love and his own experience. His sense both of gratitude and undeservingness is something akin to a reverence that may aptly be understood in terms of grace. This may also help revise a prevalent twentieth-century reading of Troilus’s Boethian song—“Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce . . . / Bynd this acord . . .” (III.1744–71)—which interprets the relation between speaker and text ironically as a token of Troilus’s misguided presumption. He supposedly identifies his own love and its endurance with Boethius’s invocation of the harmoniously regulated and enduring order of love as a cosmic force, although there is little indication that Troilus’s song is an allegory of personal feeling that makes such a direct identification. It often used to be claimed that the one line in its Boethian source that is omitted from Troilus’s version—translated in Chaucer’s *Boece* as “O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages!” (2.m.8.25–7)—points to his deficient understanding of love, since Chaucer thereby omits to make Troilus pray as Boethius does for human

hearts to be governed by the love that governs heaven. The reverse, however, is equally possible: that Chaucer excludes this line precisely because its retention would align the song more closely with an expression of Troilus's own will and wishes on human love's relation to such cosmic love. It would give Troilus a moralizing stance toward his fellow men, and might even imply that Troilus prays for the rest of mankind to achieve what he has gained. Indeed, in eliding this single Boethian line, Chaucer, as so often in *Troilus and Criseyde*, seeks rather to expand the implication, resonance, and power of all that love may include, whether as viewed by Troilus or, inevitably differently, by readers ("To techen hem that they ben in the vice, / And loveres nought, although they holde hem nyce," III.1392–3).

Nor would it seem that Chaucer regarded the love of Troilus and Criseyde from so otherworldly a perspective as twentieth-century criticism. On the contrary, in the Retractions to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer repents of *Troilus*, along with most of his other compositions, as "worldly vanitees" (X(I), 1085), which would have been scarcely necessary if he shared the religious modern interpretation of the poem as a cumulative critique of earthly love. In the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, the "Chaucer" figure counters the God of Love's accusation that both *Troilus* and Chaucer's translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* make "wise folk fro me withdrawe" (F 331) by instead claiming an authorial intention in these works to promote fidelity in love and, by example, to warn against unfaithfulness (466–74). Although such a fictionalized authorial manifesto may not be taken literally, it implies Chaucer's view that his poem here entitled simply *Criseyde* is not "By swich ensample" (474) any absolute recommendation to withdraw from love. It is not too soon to seek a reading of the poem's approach to love that attempts to match the openness and open-endedness of *Troilus* itself as inseparably both a humanist and experimental work, a poem of human experience in time, which may include time for a religious perspective. Even in the more recent postmodernist fashion for emphasizing the poem's multiplicity of viewpoints and voices,¹⁶ it has been uncommon—yet logical and timely—for the poem's conclusion itself to be included as not more than one among that multiplicity.

Notes

1. All Chaucer quotation is from *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
2. For an overview and interpretation, see "Ending(s)," in Barry Windeatt, *The Oxford Guides to Chaucer: "Troilus and Criseyde"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 209–313.

3. Cf. D.W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," *English Literary History* 19 (1952): 1–37; Ida Gordon, *The Double Sorrow of Troilus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Alan Gaylord, "The Lesson of the *Troilus*: Chastisement and Correction," in *Essays on "Troilus and Criseyde"*, ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), pp. 23–42.
4. For an account, see. A.C. Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chapter 5 ("Narrative closure: The end of *Troilus and Criseyde*"). On the ending as "a kind of nervous breakdown in poetry," see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), chapter 6 ("The Ending of *Troilus*"), p. 91.
5. These include: *Troilus's* Book 4 predestination soliloquy (4.958–1078); the Book 5 "portraits" (5.799–840), still alongside Joseph of Exeter's Latin in certain manuscripts; Cassandra's potted history of Thebes (5.1485–1512), also still with its Latin source; or belated information (5.8–13) about the affair's duration.
6. On *Troilus* and *Filostrato*, see Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, pp. 50–72. For contexts from visual culture, see Gerhard Schmidt, "Chaucer in Italy: Some Remarks on the 'Chaucer Frontispiece'," in *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures: Studies in Medieval Art for George Henderson*, ed. Paul Binski and William Noel (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), pp. 478–491.
7. For a parallel text of *Troilus* and *Filostrato*, see *Geoffrey Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of "The Book of Troilus"*, ed. B.A. Windeatt (London: Longman, 1984). Reference to *Filostrato* is to this edition; translations are my own.
8. For examples of medieval "love questions," see *Two Late Medieval Love Treatises: Heloise's 'Art d'Amour' and a Collection of Demandes d'Amour*, ed. Leslie C. Brook (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1993).
9. For contexts, see Helen Phillips, "Love," in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 281–295, and David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), chapter 9 ("Courtly Love"), and Barry Windeatt, "Love," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c. 1350–c. 1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming). See also Barry Windeatt, "Courtly Writing," in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 90–109.
10. C.S. Lewis, "What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*," *Essays and Studies* 17 (1932): 56–75.
11. On lovers' gifts, see Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Laurence King, 1998), chapter 2.
12. For a heart-shaped brooch of gold, with blue and white enamel, inscribed in black-letter "Je suy vostre sans de partir" (I am yours for ever), see *Gothic: Art for England 1400–1547*, ed. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), p. 331.
13. On love sickness, see *A Treatise on Love Sickness*, ed. Donald A. Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), and

- Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 1990).
14. *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 118; cf. *Incendium Amoris*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915), p. 211.
 15. Cf. A.C. Spearing, "Troilus and Criseyde: The Illusion of Allusion," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 263–277.
 16. See Barry Windeatt, "Postmodernism," in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 400–414.

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CHAPTER 6

THE WISDOM OF OLD WOMEN: ALISOUN OF BATH AS *AUCTRICE*

Alastair Minnis

Précis: In the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue, Chaucer takes Alisoun far beyond her model—*La Vieille* in the *Roman de la Rose*. He suggests that in her performance is found true “wisdom and usage,” which confers on her the role of *auctrice*. The Tale itself goes even further in presenting an old woman as a *doctrix*, mistress of *vetular* wisdom.

It is generally recognized that the basic model for the Wife of Bath is the literary type of the old woman (*vetula*, *vielle*) who teaches the young about love. Her ultimate prototype is Dipsas, who in the first book of Ovid's *Amores* advises a young and beautiful pupil in the art of exploitation of the ardent male. Dipsas had assured her young student that her love-doctrine had been learned by long experience, and so she should pay careful attention to it. In his part of the *Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meun built on this by having *La Vieille* look back on her past life and many loves, remarking that she had never gone to a school where they taught the theory of love. “I know everything by practice . . . Experiments, which I have followed my whole life, have made me wise in love” (12774–6).¹ Chaucer's version of those sentiments is placed at the very beginning of the Wife's *Prologue*:

“Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me . . .” (III(D), 1–2)²

However, here she is speaking of the “wo that is in marriage” rather than the pleasures and pains of love as such. (This is part and parcel of Chaucer's reconstruction of Alisoun as more of a *veuve* [widow] than a *vielle*.) But the

clear message is that Alison is a sort of *magistra amoris*, a mock-serious authority on matters of human desire.

That is how the Pardoner sees her. A figure who (vaingloriously) prides himself on his preaching, he compliments the Wife of Bath on being “a noble prechour in this cas” (165), the “cas” being the topic of love and marriage; the Pardoner was about to “wedde a wyf” but now, he declares, she has put him off the idea. A little later he urges her to continue with her narrative, to “teche us yonge men of your praktike” (184–7). In similar vein, Justinus in the *Merchant’s Tale* praises Alisoun for having “declared” a lot about marriage “ful wel in litel space” (IV(E) 1685–7), and even the first-person narrator of the *General Prologue* comments on the Wife’s knowledge of the “remedies of love” (I(A) 475–6), thereby alluding to her Ovidian origins. Thomas Hoccleve extends this tradition by citing her as a specifically female authority (*auctrice*) on the subject of women’s displeasure at men’s depiction of the female sex as vicious:

The wyf of Bathe, take I for auctrice
 Pat wommen han no ioie ne deyntee
 Pat men sholde vp-on hem putte any vice . . . (694–6)³

But this, of course, is a very minor extension; a similar comment could easily be made about Ovid’s Dipsas or Jean de Meun’s Vielle. Alisoun’s ancestry is an open book. The depth of her expertise concerning “tribulacioun in marriage” (173–4) is impressive—even as the limits of that expertise (or **auctricitas*, if you will)⁴ are utterly clear: according to the above quotations, the Wife of Bath knows about things that women are *supposed* to know about, and that knowledge is, on the late medieval intellectual landscape, a small hill of beans indeed.

Hoccleve’s term *auctrice* may be compared with such similarly ironic forms as *auditrix* (“studentess”) and *doctrix* (“doctress”), as used by the thirteenth-century secular master Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) in what seems to have been an attempt at wit. Henry wrote more than any other late medieval theologian on the exclusion of women from preaching and other priestly functions, and his use of these demeaning, trivializing terms is part of his attempt to reduce the notion of female ministry *ad absurdum*.⁵ In contrast, the terms *apostola* (“female apostle”) and *praedicatrix* (“preacheress”) were applied to Mary Magdalene with all due respect and seriousness—for example, by Duns Scotus (c.1265–c.1308).⁶ However, Duns’s discussion of the (non-)ordination of women stresses Mary’s unique qualities; here, then, is no general precedent for present-day women. Henry of Ghent was quite willing to concede that she had received the gift of different tongues along with the male apostles and had been sent out to teach and preach publicly

just as they had been. However, he adds that things have changed greatly since the days of the early Church, the clear implication being that nowadays women should keep to their traditional roles. The Lollards Walter Brut and John Purvey seized upon the supposed fact of Mary's ministry in support of their advocacy of female preachers. Unsurprisingly, the anti-Brut *quaestio* "Utrum liceat mulieribus docere viros publice congregatos" affirms Henry of Ghent's explanation that Mary and other women were allowed to preach only because of a grave but temporary shortage of manpower,⁷ while a passage in Thomas Netter's *Doctrinale* (written in direct refutation of Purvey's views) includes her among women who helped the Church in time of extreme peril or great need, this being a very different thing from preaching *ex officio*.⁸ All this is, of course, a far cry from Hoccleve's use of the term *auctrice*. In his view, the Wife of Bath's authority is confined to the relatively safe subjects of sex, marriage, and the ways of women—subjects which, far from threatening male superiority, enable men to demonstrate it with misogynistic pronouncements about women's limited intellectual capacities, sensual obsessions, and emotional instability.

But Hoccleve's Alisoun cannot be equated with Chaucer's. The Wife of Bath's *Prologue* and *Tale* move this figure far beyond such predictable parameters, granting her a wider and deeper area of expertise. In the *Prologue* a formidable number of Latin *auctores* are alleged, while in the *Tale* a wise old woman appears who is able to quote Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Boethius, and Juvenal, along with the Bible and "the wise poete of Florence," Dante; here we are offered a challenging homily on the nature of true gentility, the advantages of poverty, and the superficiality—as seen from a moral perspective—of physical ugliness. Little wonder, then, that when her tale is told the Friar uneasily exclaims:

Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
 In scole-matere greet difficultee.
 Ye han seyde muche thyng right wel, I seye;
 But dame, heere as we ryden by the weye,
 Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
 And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
 To prechyng and to scoles of clergie. (III(D), 1271–7)

St. Paul and legions of medieval schoolmen had declared that women should not (and usually could not) preach or teach, and certainly they should not be taught difficult "scole-matere." But not everyone was prepared to accept the standard strategies of social and intellectual control, as the dissident thought of Walter Brut and John Purvey makes abundantly clear. All the more reason, then, for the Friar's discomfiture.

But, although sometimes she speaks in a way which could well have aroused suspicion, the Wife of Bath is no Lollard. Alisoun has received her intellectual (and some of her amatory) schooling not from some Lollard classroom or conventicle but from her last husband, named Jenkyn, an Oxford student trained in reading, writing, and argument, who read aloud to her (translating into English in the process, of course) from his anthology of antifeminist texts. Jenkyn did not put on a course of Bible-study for his wife, but when his misogynistic *auctores* quoted Scripture to suit themselves, she inevitably was exposed to the procedures of scriptural exegesis. Thus Chaucer accounts for the Wife of Bath's learning and scholastic skill. Not all of her information could possibly have come from Jenkyn's book, of course; the poet is not that precise or pedantic. The important thing to recognize is that Chaucer made a major gesture toward verisimilitude—and perhaps this was done for reasons which went beyond those of literary decorum, reasons which involved an element of self-protection.

Academic techniques of "arguing by authority" permeate Alisoun's long monologue. She pits *auctoritas* against *auctoritas*, seeking to cap one with another; she asks if what an author seems to be saying is what he really meant; she suggests that different authoritative statements may apply in different circumstances and to different types of people. All of this is perfectly good scholastic procedure and bears comparison with Peter Abelard's famous account of such tricks of the trade in his *Sic et Non* prologue. Take the Wife's treatment of Saint Jerome's "book agayn Jovinian," for instance, an "antifeminist classic" to which the first hundred lines or so of her *Prologue* are deeply indebted. Against the fact that Christ attended just one wedding and therefore did not place a high value on marriage (according to Jerome), Alisoun quotes the teaching of Genesis that mankind should be fruitful and multiply; marriage therefore must be a good thing, so what then is wrong with multiple marriages? (It should be recalled that one of Jerome's main motives in writing against Jovinian had been the exhortation of women who had behaved just like the Wife of Bath in rushing from one marriage into another, refusing the virtuous state of chaste widowhood.) To dismiss this sort of argument as ridiculous casuistry would be to diminish the challenge of Chaucer's construction. Alisoun acts and talks not just like a man but like an *educated* man, a graduate of the "scoles of clergye." Or indeed, like a preacher—and a real preacher at that, not just a metaphorical one who teaches love-doctrine, as in the Pardoner's formulation; maybe a true word was being said in his jest. Dr Samuel Johnson once infamously remarked, "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all."⁹ What is surprising about the Wife of Bath, however, is how well she performs those pedagogic processes which the Friar, rendered uneasy by her virtuoso

performance, wants to confine to official preaching and academic training. There was nothing particularly troubling about an old woman teaching about love and womanly wiles—witness Ovid's Dipsas and Jean de Meun's old crone. But the Wife's *Prologue* and *Tale* go far beyond the "cas" of love and marriage and exceed what the Friar regards as appropriate behavior on the road to Canterbury. She certainly has surmounted the confining discourses of the game of love. In other words, the Wife of Bath can talk like a *doctrinx* rather than a *magistra amoris*.

Before proceeding further with this argument, it is essential that the question be asked: just how much of a *magistra amoris* is she? This question is complicated by the fact that, as Norman Blake puts it, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is arguably "the most altered piece" in the entire poem,¹⁰ and many of those changes bear directly on the issue of her **auctricitas*. No fewer than six crucial passages (44a–f, 575–84, 605–8, 609–12, 619–26 and 717–20) do not appear in all the earliest manuscripts, and, in the view of Beverly Kennedy, they "transform what would otherwise be a thoroughly ambiguous representation of her sexual morality into one which leaves no doubt of her immoral behaviour."¹¹ While I admire this wake-up call concerning the shifting nature of the Wife's *Prologue* (critics have indeed put too much trust in the stability of the *Riverside Chaucer's* text), I would question Kennedy's belief that their removal in some way restores "thorough ambiguity" to the representation of Alisoun's sexual morality.

The first of the passages in question has the Wife bragging about her husbands' sexual and financial prowess.

Of whiche [i.e., husbands] I have pyked out the beste,
Both of here nether purs and of here cheste.
Diverse scoles maken parfyte clerkes,
And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes
Maketh the werkman parfyte sekirly;
Of fyve husbondes scoleiyng am I. (44a–f)

There is much that is strange here. For a start, this passage disrupts the pleasing continuity of lines 44 and 45:

Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve.
Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal!

Moreover, the notion that her five husbands were all of the "beste" both sexually and financially hardly chimes with what Alisoun says elsewhere about the physical inadequacies of her first three old husbands (196–203)¹² and the fiscal inadequacies of her last two young ones. Husband number four was a dissolute "revelour" (453) who seems to have much in common

with the drunken and spendthrift “riotoures thre” of the *Pardoner’s Tale* (VI(C), 661), while husband number five was a grave business risk—far from making money out of this marriage, the Wife gave over to Jenkyn “all the lond and fee” that previously had been given to her (630–1). I suppose it could be argued that the first three husbands were “the beste” of “here cheste” while the last two were “the beste” of “here nether purs”—but that rather strains interpretation of 44a–b.

On the other hand, lines 44c–f are quite supportive of a major discourse which Chaucer indubitably pursued, namely the language of “scolei yng”: Alisoun takes time out from the schools of love and such “education” as her five husbands provided, to seek admission (however temporarily and problematically) to the “scoles of clergie.” The passage in question is in full accord with the initial stage of that trajectory:

Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,
And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes
Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly;
Of fyve husbondes scolei yng am I.

Moreover, on the face of it, the reference to Alisoun’s amatory academies seems to echo the following passage from the *Roman de la Rose*:

n’onc ne fui d’Amors a escole
ou l’en leüst la theorique,
mes je sai tout par la pratique. (12772–4)

[I have never been to the school of Love, where they
teach the theory, but I know it all through practice.]

Indeed, these lines immediately precede the ones which, quite clearly, influenced Chaucer’s striking opening to the Wife’s *Prologue*, wherein Alisoun declares that she has gained great authority through much experience of “wo that is in marriage” (1–3; quoted at the beginning of this chapter).

But quite different points are being made. The French text draws a contrast between theory as taught in school and practice as gained in what might be called “real life”: and this is the sense which Chaucer follows in ll. 1–3. The interpolation merges schooling and “real life,” making the Wife’s husbands into both teachers and “workmen” and reducing their teaching to diverse kinds of “practyk.” This has more in common with the Pardoner’s request that Alisoun should teach “us yonge men” something of her “praktike” (184–7) than with the relevant *Rose* passage. Moreover, the reference in l. 44e to love’s labors is reminiscent of old January’s comment

to his unimpressed young bride:

“Ther nys no werkman, whatsoevere he be,
That may bothe werke wel and hastily;
This wol be doon at leyser parfitly.” (*Merchant’s Tale*, IV(E), 1832–4)

In sum, there is no compelling argument here for Chaucer’s authorship of the disputed lines, and much may be said against this hypothesis. We may be dealing with a scribe/redactor who was prompted to make an addition here by his recollection of passages from elsewhere in Chaucer’s work, someone who was basically (but certainly not closely) in tune with the poet’s interest in “scole-matere” both humorous and serious.¹³

There is something ironic, however, in the fact that this disquisition—at least part of which seems to be consonant with Chaucer’s scheme of things—is, among the problem passages highlighted by Blake and Kennedy, the one of which editors have been most suspicious. *Au contraire*, they have been less cautious about lines which, in my view, have little if anything in common with other parts of the text—and which, indeed, threaten to disrupt and even debase Chaucer’s construction of the Wife’s character. I refer to the utterly bizarre passage (ll. 575–84) which describes Alisoun dreaming of Jenkyn all night—he is murdering her, and her bed is full of blood. I agree entirely with Kennedy’s view that this “sado-masochistic nightmare” is “both psychologically and dramatically implausible”:¹⁴ it is hardly likely that a skilled *magistra amoris* would say such a thing to her lover as an inducement to marriage, and her tentative interpretation of the blood as betokening gold hardly helps. “Yet I hope that he shall do me some good,” Alisoun speculates, but, as Kennedy notes, it is the wealthy Wife of Bath who will be doing Jenkyn some good by bestowing her worldly goods upon him, and *that* is an obvious inducement for him to marry her—however, the text seems to get this the wrong way round.

Kennedy is on even stronger ground, I believe, in challenging the authenticity of ll. 619–26, where Alisoun is made to say that she

Ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,
But evere folwede myn appetit,
Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;
I took no kep, so that he liked me,
How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.

This “explicit statement of total promiscuity,” as Rosemary Woolf called it, “substantially changes the moral tenor of the *Prologue*.”¹⁵ It is far more extreme than La Vielle’s recommendation that a woman “should spread her nets everywhere to ensnare all men, for since she cannot know whose favor she may win, she should sink her hook into all of them in order to

attract at least one to herself" (*Rose*, 13559–64). Of all the disputed passages cited by Kennedy in substantiation of her view that the revisions "leave no doubt of her immoral behaviour," "make her sexual immorality seem certain,"¹⁶ this one affords by far the strongest evidence.

However, *pace* Kennedy, other passages merely reiterate qualities which are already there, well-documented by parts of the Chaucerian text which are undisputed. The notion that "womman was the los of al mankynde" (720) is hardly incongruous in a "book of wikked wyves." Alisoun's remark that her husbands told her she had "the best *quoniam* myghte be" (608) is paralleled by the references to her sexual organ as a *bel chose* (447, 510); also textually well attested is the passage in which she puts her personal spin on the clerks' reasons for the creation of the human genitalia, here called "thynges smale," (121) as is her designation of both the male and female members as "instruments" (132, 149). The Wife also remarks that "every wight" who has "such harneys" as she has been describing is obliged to use them "in engendrure" (135–7). In these passages she seems to illustrate the linguistic hypocrisy of woman, as famously attacked by Raison in the *Roman de la Rose*. Women use euphemisms to designate the male sexual organs, as if they cannot bear them, yet they do not complain when they come into contact with the things themselves.

Chascune qui les va nomant
 les apele ne sai conmant,
 borses, harnais, riens, piches, pines,
 ausint con ce fussent espines;
 mes quant les sentent bien joignanz,
 els nes tienent pas a poignanz. (7111–16).

[The women who name them call them all sorts of things: purses, harness, things, torches, pricks, as though they were thorns, but when they feel them very near they do not find them painful.]

Here, then, is further testimony to the Wife's lascivious nature, and it certainly has not been added by some of Chaucer's "first clerical readers" by way of "protest" against his "morally ambiguous text."¹⁷

The weakest point of Kennedy's thesis is her interpretation of the following passage, as reconstructed following deletion of supposed interpolations:

. . . al myn herte I yaf unto his [Jenkyn's] hoold
 He was, I trowe, twenty wynter oold,
 And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth,
 But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.
 Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;

I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
 Allas, allas! That evere love was synne!
 I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
 By vertu of my constellacioun;
 That made me I koude noght withdrawe
 My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
 What should I seye but, at the monthes ende,
 This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,
 Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee. . . .
 (599–604, 613–18, 627–9).

Seeking to make this passage more morally ambiguous than (I believe) it is, Kennedy argues that Alisoun's "chambre of Venus" can be read not only as her pudendum but also as her heart—the heart which, at the beginning of this passage, she gives unto Jankyn's keeping. Kennedy offers this as the result of a consideration of the term "from the contemporary romantic point of view"—a viewpoint which she does not substantiate with parallels from other texts. (Furthermore, even with the removal of supposedly interpolated matter the reference to Alisoun's heart seems some distance away from the reference to the lady's chamber of Venus; it seems highly unlikely that Chaucer would have expected his audience to assume that the same organ was being designated on both occasions.) However, Kennedy continues, "taken from the earlier mythographic point of view (represented by the scholarly Jean de Meun's obscene pun on *Venus chambre* in the *Roman de la Rose* [13306] it would refer to her 'queynte' ".¹⁸ She adds that "Chaucer's text does not allow the reader to be certain which of these two possible meanings the Wife intends." At least one reader is in no doubt of which meaning is intended. The passage quoted above explains the Wife's sexual aggression in relation to her horoscope.¹⁹ Alisoun amusingly justifies the fact that she always has followed her "inclinacioun" with the argument that her "constellacioun" has disposed her that way: the girl can't help it. Her moral awareness that love may be "synne" has not stopped her from making it, and making a lot of it.

However, Kennedy claims that, leaving out of the calculation the men she married, "Chaucer's text" is "deliberately ambiguous on the subject" of Alisoun's "sexual behaviour outside of marriage."²⁰ What, then, do we make of the *General Prologue's* statement that she had married five husbands "at chirche dore," "Withouten oother compaignye in youthe?" (GP 459–60), which seems to hint that her favors were distributed beyond the men who became her husbands? This too is ambiguous, in Kennedy's view: *either* she had no friends or lovers apart from her husbands *or* she had many friends or lovers not counting her husbands. "Chaucer's text gives

the reader no help at all in deciding which of these contradictory meanings to choose."²¹ But surely the text is weighted in one direction. After all, this woman has done much "wandering by the way"—improbable as an allusion to sex within marriage—and is an expert on the "remedies of love," that "olde daunce" (467, 476); her faux-naïve claim that she does not understand what Christ meant when he referred to the Samaritan woman's last "husband" as not really being her husband (i.e., he was her lover) is also highly revealing (17–19). Like her predecessors Dipsas and La Vielle, Alisoun's experience and authority defy the boundaries of wedlock. Besides, the strength (or excess, some would say) of her sexual desire is manifest throughout her *Prologue* and *Tale*; indeed her performance ends with a mock-prayer that God should send "us" women "housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde" (1259). True, she is speaking of husbands rather than lovers—but this does not diminish the force of her unruly femininity.

And here, I believe, is the very essence of her character, which overrides questions about whether and when she has been adulterous, how often, and with whom. Underlying Kennedy's argument seems to be an assumption that lasciviousness within marriage (or before marriage) is less reprehensible than adultery—the more she can confine Alisoun's sexual escapades within her relationships with the men she married, the more "morally ambiguous" Chaucer's construction turns out to be. But it was not only the "Victorians" who "regarded serial marriage as tantamount to promiscuity";²² that was very much the view perpetrated by Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, one of Jenkyn's favorite texts and Alisoun's main target in the first part of her *Prologue*. "Where there are more husbands than one the proper idea of a husband, who is a single person, is destroyed," declares the Saint, adding that "at the beginning" (i.e., in the Genesis account) "one rib was turned into one wife", and the couple were to 'be one flesh—not three, or four"²³ St. Paul allowed virgins to marry in order that they might avoid fornication, and, "so to avoid this same fornication," he allows widows to remarry. Indeed, it is better to know "a single husband" (though he be the second or third in line) "than to have many lovers"—"that is, it is more tolerable for a woman to prostitute herself to one man than to many." On this argument, marriage and whoredom have much in common, and multiple marriage is akin to serial prostitution.

Chaucer was fully aware of the doctrine that marriage cannot altogether justify and excuse sexual desire; old January's belief that "A man may do no synne with his wyf" being one of his many delusions (cf. *Merchant's Tale*, IV(E), 1835–41). In fact, if a husband and wife "assemble oonly for amorous love," and "accomplice thilke brennyng delit" at will, then they are committing mortal sin. This is what Chaucer himself says in the text we

know as the *Parson's Tale*.²⁴ In his copy of "Jerome against Jovinian" he would have read the unequivocal statement that the man who loves his wife too ardently is an adulterer: *Adulter est . . . in suam uxorem amator ardentior*. Jerome proceeds to quote Seneca to the effect that "too much love" of one's own wife is "shameful." "A wise man ought to love his wife with judgment, not affection (*affectus*)."²⁵ Let him control his impulses and not be borne headlong into copulation. Nothing is fouler than to love a wife like an adulteress."²⁶ Such statements (quite typically) view the situation from the man's point of view, but of course the same moral imperatives apply to the female of the species. The Wife of Bath loves too ardently, and in her life-story, sexual assembly "oonly for amorous love" features largely. She is right to say that "to be wedded is no sinne" (51). But wedlock does not take away the taint of sin from everything that is done within it, particularly those "actes" of marriage (cf. l. 144) that seem to be Alisoun's main interest in the sacrament and institution.

Like the Nun's Priest's Chauncicleer, she is a servant of Venus ("goddesse of plesaunce") insofar as she labors "Moore for delit than world to multiplye" (VII, 3345): this despite her early invocation of the divine injunction to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) and the emphasis she places on the idea that "members" were made for the purpose of "generacioun" as well as for "purgacioun / Of urine" (28, 120–1). Of any progeny Alisoun may have produced within any of her liaisons, we hear nothing. In terms of the cultural norms then prevailing, her advocacy of marriage (or, more accurately, highly selective aspects of it) was no excuse for a long and loud history of a life of self-gratification,²⁷ indecorous reference to sexual organs together with use of ostentatious euphemisms (which draw attention to, rather than obscure, their referents), and outrageous battles of the sexes in which uppity females win sovereignty over problematic males. In short, Chaucer's "first clerical readers" did not need to "rewrite" the Wife of Bath "in conformity with clerical antifeminism";²⁸ that was, in large measure, how Chaucer himself had written her. We are not allowed to forget that his main model was the *magistra amoris* as exemplified by the lascivious old women of Ovid and Jean de Meun. Even if all the problem passages were to be removed from the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* (and among modern editors only Norman Blake has been prepared to go that far), many—apparently quite authentic—others remain, passage which are deeply permeated with misogynistic assumptions similar to the ones expressed by the disputed material.

For all these reasons, I believe that the Wife of Bath's performance of her sexual desires is a lot less ambiguous than Kennedy has argued. But why would the poet have wished to make Alisoun into an outrageous advocate for "amorous love" in marriage (and beyond)? Because, I believe, he was engaging in a literary experiment of quite radical proportions. In the

Pardoner's Tale, which dates from this same period, we are asked to consider the startling possibility that the most immoral of men can tell the most moral of tales. Alisoun's disquisition goes even farther than that. One of the most despised stereotypes in medieval literature, the sexually rapacious *veuve*, depicts an even more despised stereotype, the *vielle*, dispensing wisdom of the highest order rather than talking dirty and teaching the art of sexual promiscuity. Thus Chaucer decisively distances Alisoun from her literary predecessors. Furthermore, this academically adept *veuve* offers a unique version of the tale of the loathly damsel, which invests the *vetula* with sovereignty of soul. Here, I believe, Chaucer sought to exploit the fact that, in his day, "ageing was considered conducive to increased wisdom, to spiritual growth, as well as to liberation from passion and earthly ambitions."²⁹ He therefore plays on the moral advantages of vetularity, which frequently feature in "hooly seintes lives" (the only clerical texts, Alisoun remarks caustically, that speak well of women (III(D), 686–91)). In this genre, old age is valorized within what might be termed the *spiritual* "female life-cycle";³⁰ once they reached mature age, certain holy women took upon themselves, with official blessing, a more public role, advising their communities, exhorting people of both sexes to virtue, and even making prophecies. Furthermore, it was a great compliment to describe a young woman with spiritual aspirations as being old before her time. For example, Juliana of Mont-Cornillon's biographer describes her as "in body . . . a little girl (*juvencula*), but in mind a grey-haired old lady (*cana*),"³¹ while Raymond of Capua recounts how there was nothing girlish about the actions of the six-year old Catherine of Siena, but rather they showed that she possessed wisdom well in advance of her age.³²

Later in life, Catherine wishes to join the Dominican sisters of Penance but is initially rebuffed, because it is "is not their custom to invest maids, either young or old, with the habit"; "only respectable widows of mature age who wanted to dedicate themselves to the service of God" are admitted. However, the sisters partially relent in the face of the entreaties of Catherine's mother: "If your daughter is not too pretty or attractive," they say cautiously, "we will accept her, out of consideration for her great enthusiasm, and yours: but, as, already said, if she is very pretty we should be afraid of some scandal."³³ Fortunately, at this time Catherine's whole body has come out in blisters, and so she passes their scrutiny—and, of course, she proceeds to bring much honor to the Siennese sisters.

In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* the erasure of female pulchritude is similarly consonant with profound wisdom. But is this epiphanic moment not too brief? The romance conventions, which require the happy ending of a bath of married bliss, reassert themselves, and the wise old woman becomes a beautiful, subservient young wife. My response would be that Chaucer

could hardly invent a new narrative form from scratch. He goes as far as he can with the old one, his account of the spellbound maiden being kept down to the absolute minimum. There is no explanation of how she came to be enchanted in the first place, with no wicked stepmother to blame it on (as in John Gower's version of the story, included in his *Confessio amantis*). Any less detail, and the narrative would stall. Any more, and the *vetula*'s teaching would be undermined, since a woman who turned out to be ostentatiously aristocratic, rich, young, and beautiful would make a highly unconvincing advocate for virtuous poverty, the advantages of ugliness, and *gentillesse* by merit alone. Thus the challenge of Chaucer's virtuous *vetula* remains; the ending—which puts the man (despite his earlier crime of violent rape) back on top and recalls the Wife of Bath's strong sexual appetites—does not negate its force retrospectively.

The title of this chapter echoes and engages with the title of Jan Ziolkowski's essay, "The Obscenities of Old Women. Vetularity and Vernacularity."³⁴ I believe that, far from merely reproducing a *vielle*-figure who embodies "total filth and vile teaching,"³⁵ Chaucer ventured to suggest that, for women as much as for men, in "elde" may be found "wysdom and usage"³⁶—a wisdom which transcends expertise in the art of love and amatory "praktike," or the tricks which "wise wyves" use to manipulate their husbands (cf. ll. 225–8). For a wonderful, indeed magical, moment at the climax of the Wife's *Tale*, the aged female figure is accepted as more than a misogynistic amalgam of gross lies and deceit, obscene words and deeds, and jealous involvement in the affairs of youth. The radical force of this approbation survives the precariousness of its textual configuration. But it is, I believe, threatened by critical overambiguation (in effect, a move toward normalization) of Alisoun's sexual morality as performed in her *Prologue*.

Notes

1. All citations of the *Rose* are from the edition by Félix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 1965–1970). Throughout this paper I draw on the translations by Charles Dahlberg (Hanover and London: Princeton University Press, 1971, rpt. 1983) and Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
2. Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
3. *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, ed. F.J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz, EETS ES 61 and 73 (London: Oxford University Press, rpt. 1970), p. 135. Subsequent developments of the Wife of Bath along similar lines are reviewed by Helen Cooper, "The Shape-shiftings of the Wife of Bath, 1395–1670," in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 168–184.

4. The coinage is Ian Johnson's, designed to highlight the cultural problems and paradoxes inherent in the notion of "female authority" in general and an "authoress" in particular, with specific reference to the holiness of women as presented in Middle English. See his article "★*Auctricitas*★? Holy Women and their Middle English Texts," in Rosalynn Voaden (ed.), *The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1996), pp. 177–197.
5. Cf. Alastair Minnis, "The *Accessus* Extended: Henry of Ghent on the Transmission and Reception of Theology," in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark Jordan and Kent Emery (Notre Dame, IN, and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 275–326. See further Alcuin Blamires, "Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saint's Lives," *Viator* 26 (1995): 135–152.
6. Cf. Alastair Minnis, "*De impedimento sexus*: Women's Bodies and Medieval Impediments to Female Ordination," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press with Boydell and Brewer, 1997), pp. 109–139 (p. 127).
7. See Alcuin Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 255. The *quaestio* has been edited by Blamires and C.W. Marx, "Woman Not to Preach: A Disputation in British Library MS Harley 31," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 3 (1993): 34–63.
8. Cf. Netter's *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae* (Venice, 1757–1759), i. 639. John Purvey, who had been ordained a priest in 1377/8, was tried by Archbishop Thomas Arundel and recanted seven heresies at St Paul's Cross, London, in 1401. According to Netter, who quotes from it, Purvey's *De Compendiis scripturarum, paternarum doctrinarum et canonem* included a justification of women preachers. This work has not survived, and our only witness to its doctrine is Netter's attack on it here in the *Doctrinale* (probably written between 1421 and 1427).
9. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G.B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), i, 463.
10. "The Wife of Bath and Her Tale," *Leeds Studies in English* 13 (1982): 42–55 (esp. 45, 47).
11. "The Variant Passages in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the Textual Transmission of *The Canterbury Tales*: The 'Great Tradition' Revisited," in *Women, the Book and the Worldly*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 85–101 (p. 86). Here Kennedy is going beyond the argument of Norman Blake (cf. the previous note), who draws attention to the disputed passages but believes that they "merely emphasise qualities already imputed to the Wife," as Kennedy puts it (p. 86). See further her two later articles "Cambridge MS. Dd.4.24: A Misogynous Scribal Revision of the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue," *Chaucer Review* 30 (1995–1996): 343–358, and "The Rewriting of the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue in Cambridge Dd.4.24," in *Rewriting Chaucer: Culture, Authority and the Idea of the Authentic Text, 1400–1602*, ed. T.A. Pendergast and B. Kline (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 203–233.

12. In the preceding lines (35–44) Alisoun imagines how the “noble king” Solomon had “many a myrie fit” with each of his wives, but such pleasure does not seem to have attended her couplings with all of her husbands, as is made abundantly clear by her subsequent report of how she sexually exploited (faking orgasm being one of her many tricks) and henpecked the three old men.
13. Another apparent parallel with the *Rose* may be detected in the disputed passage 575–84; with “I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me” compare *Rose*, “Si croi qu’ous m’avez anchantee” (13661). And the line “My dame taughte me that soutiltee”—apparently a reference to Alisoun’s mother—could recall La Vielle as the instructor who originally recommended such flattery. But this argument is hardly compelling, and a flirtatious young woman’s claim that her lover has enchanted her with a song is some distance away from the meaning of the disputed English passage, which has the Wife of Bath claim that she dreamed of being murdered in her bed by Jenkyn.
14. “Variant Passages,” p. 88.
15. “Moral Chaucer-Kindly Gower,” in Heather O’Donoghue (ed.), *Art and Doctrine: Essays on Medieval Literature by Rosemary Woolf* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 197–218 (pp. 217–218).
16. “Variant Passages,” pp. 86, 89.
17. “Rewriting,” p. 204.
18. Kennedy, “Cambridge MS. Dd.4.24,” pp. 354–355. It is curious to see Jean de Meun’s pun being taken as representative of some “earlier mythographic point of view.” For a recent affirmation of the originality of Jean’s treatment see my book *Magister Amoris: The “Roman de la Rose” and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially chapters 2 and 3.
19. It is just possible that, in addition to the sexual innuendo, the “chambre” of Venus picks up on the astronomical/astrological language that Chaucer uses in the lines immediately preceding. An astrological “house” meant a sign of the zodiac serving as “the seat of a planet and the position of its greatest influence”; cf. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *hous*, 6. And in Middle English the term *hous* could refer to “a portion of a building, an apartment, a chamber, room” (cf. *MED*, s.v. *hous*, 2). But such a wordplay, if it exists, is very different in both form and content from the ambiguity postulated by Kennedy.
20. “Variant Passages,” p. 97. Without the disputed Dd-passages, she believes, “we have no evidence that she has ever committed fornication or adultery.”
21. “Rewriting,” p. 206.
22. “Variant Passages,” p. 87; cf. p. 98.
23. *Adversus Jovinianum*, i.14; PL 23, 233B–C.
24. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 322. Sexual intercourse may be justified on three grounds, “entente of engendrure of children” (that being the final cause or ultimate objective of matrimony), to yield each to the other “the dette of hire bodies,” and “to eschewe leccherye and vileynye” (p. 321).

25. On the technical—and changing—meaning of the notion of “marital affection,” see especially John T. Noonan, “Marital Affection in the Canonists,” *Studia Gratiana* 12 (1967): 479–509.
26. *Adversus Iovinianum*, i.49; *PL* 23, 281A–B. Cf. John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of its treatment by Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 47.
27. Hence Joseph Mogan can remark that “her sensuality is too abundant to serve any but her own ends”; “Chaucer and the *Bona matrimonii*,” *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970): 123–141 (p.138). Cf. Alisoun’s emphasis on her personal “profit” and “ese” (214), the latter term intimating the pleasure she takes in conjugal relations.
28. “Rewriting,” p. 211.
29. Shulamith Shahar, “The Old Body in Medieval Culture,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 160–186 (p. 160).
30. Here I build upon the work of Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, “The Prime of their Lives: Women and Age, Wisdom and Religious Careers in Northern Europe,” in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact*, ed. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 215–236 (esp. pp. 220–222).
31. *The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon*, trans. Barbara Newman, rev. edn. (Toronto: Peregrina, 1991), p. 30.
32. *Raymond of Capua, The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, trans. George Lamb (London: Harvill Press, 1960), p. 26.
33. *Raymond of Capua, Life of St Catherine*, trans. Lamb, pp. 61, 73.
34. Published in Jan M. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 73–89.
35. Which is what Christine de Pizan thought of Jean de Meun’s Old Woman: *Le débat*, ed. Hicks, p. 130; trans. Baird and Kane, p. 129. She goes on to condemn La Vielle’s “immoral lessons (*disoluciones*),” and finds a “wasteful display of crude words” (*gastement de paroles maugraceutes*) in Jean’s portrayal of both the Old Woman and the Jealous Man.
36. Cf. *Knight’s Tale*, I(A), 2447.

CHAPTER 7

“NAT THAT I CHALANGE ANY THYNG OF RIGHT”: LOVE, LOYALTY, AND LEGALITY IN THE *FRANKLIN’S TALE*

Neil Cartlidge

Précis: This chapter argues that Chaucer presents us in the Franklin’s Tale with a moral dilemma that is scholastic in its cultivated intractability. By adducing a number of other medieval texts, it argues that this text ought to be discussed with reference to the particular circumstances in which the marriage-vow might be abrogated.

Love is such an elemental feature of human experience, and yet so variously and individually felt, that any attempt to define and contain it, whether in literature or in socialized, legalized forms such as marriage, inevitably ends up pointing to its own analytical limitations. Poets celebrating love sometimes foreground the very impossibility of the enterprise by complaining so loudly of the inadequacy of word and image, or by cataloguing love’s effects so minutely and at such length, as to demonstrate implicitly the abundance and magnitude of their theme. Other writers make greater claims for their competence, presenting love as an “art” of which they are masters. This is an essentially comic strategy, since the pretence to technical expertise in such a field is intrinsically ludicrous, and it tends to make love less an object of enquiry, than an opportunity for witty satire at the expense of lovers. For the Middle Ages, the father of this tradition was the Roman poet Ovid, whose erotic poetry—particularly his *Ars Amatoria*—provided a deeply influential model of irony and urbanity for the literary treatment of love. Among Ovid’s medieval readers was a twelfth or thirteenth-century writer known as “Andreas Capellanus,”¹ whose lengthy treatise *On Love* (*De Amore*)² turns this idea of an “art of love”

into a mockery of the various specific “arts” then coming into prominence in intellectual life—arts such as those of preaching (*ars praedicatoria*) or of letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*). His work could also be seen more generally as a sustained parody of the systematic rationalism so very characteristic of the age of scholasticism. Yet there is also a point to Andreas’s playful appropriation of scholastic forms and methods. This was also the period in which the Church was developing its own elaborate and often cumbersome system for the regulation of human sexual relationships by marriage. Many of the issues addressed by canon lawyers resemble or correspond to those discussed by Andreas—such as proper age-limits, consanguinity, enforced absence, and so on; and they approached them with much the same mixture of dogged reasoning, deference to authorities of one kind or another, and sheer arbitrariness, as he did.³ For the lawyers, of course, the issues were substantive—they were literally legislating for love’s place in society, in a way that Andreas was not; but this in no way effaces the comedy in Andreas’s observation of the essential incongruity between the rigor of their methods and the intellectual intangibility of love.

Chaucer, like Andreas, is aware of “love” as a discourse as well as an experience; and he is likewise at least as interested in how questions about love are asked as he is in love itself. His reference to the terms and routines of scholastic enquiry is generally less explicit than Andreas’s, but in the *Franklin’s Tale* he takes what seems to be a markedly scholastic, and specifically legalistic, approach to love. Not only is the *Tale* in essence a moral dilemma that might be described as scholastic in its contrived intractability, but Chaucer also chooses to draw attention to just this aspect of it by concluding it with a *quaestio disputanda*—a problem formally offered for disputation, rather like those practiced in the universities.⁴ This *quaestio* in effect asks the reader to judge a competition in renunciation—to make a comparative evaluation of the different legal or moral rights which each of the male characters has apparently established under some form of contract, but which each deliberately chooses to waive. So the clerk of Orléans forgoes the thousand pounds that Aurelius promises to pay according to the “covenant” (V(F), 1587) between them; Aurelius, in turn, explicitly releases Dorigen from “every serement and every bond” (1534) obliging her to him, whatever they might be; and Arveragus, in his turn, is prepared to place his wife in what the narrator calls “jupartie” (1495) rather than insist on the precedence of his rights by marriage.⁵ Even when Aurelius brings Dorigen the news that the rocks have gone, he reminds her of his claim under the terms of her vow to him only by *denying* his own contractual rights in markedly legalistic language: “Nat that I chalange any thyng of right/Of yow, my sovereyn lady, but youre grace” (1324–25); while the marital accord with which the *Tale* so memorably begins (744–98) might

be read likewise as a deliberate refusal (in this case, a mutual one) to make use of the constraints implicit in marriage as a legal relationship.

From this point of view, the *Tale* might be seen as a conscious attempt to write the very concept of formal legal obligation out of human relationships—a call to revolution against “law’s empire” over love in favor of a republic governed by grace, “franchise” or “gentillesse.”⁶ Conversely, however, it could be argued that the *Tale* sets standards of obligations that are considerably stricter and more literalistic than could ever be enforced consistently in practice; and it extends contractual responsibility beyond limits that were clearly established in Chaucer’s time. Aurelius’s interpretation of Dorigen’s so-called Rash Promise assumes an objective formalism in the rules of contract that lawyers themselves have virtually never dared to assert: the rights that he pretends to deny are actually far more difficult to demonstrate than his confidence in them seems to imply. The respect accorded Dorigen’s “nude parole” (her “unclothed word”) is far more typical of the hyperliteralism of folktale or ritual than it is of legal practice itself, even in the Middle Ages. Similarly, although it has become fashionable to argue that the *Franklin’s Tale* conspires to deny Dorigen any real capacity for agency—that she is rendered a mere commodity between men by their mutual trade in generosity—it is important to recognize that there would have been no conflict of interest to be resolved at all, had not Arveragus followed the logic of their nuptial agreement and insisted on her unfettered competence to make binding contracts outside marriage.⁷ That is, he specifically abrogates the legal principle of *coverture*, by which a wife’s personality in matters of contract was subordinated entirely to her husband’s—in effect allowing Dorigen a capacity for agency that few wives in Chaucer’s day would have shared.⁸ In short, the *Franklin’s Tale* seems to me so deeply marked by this contradictory movement simultaneously toward and away from a sense of the depth of legalistic obligation that I think the problematic idea of contract—and more specifically, the question of how and when morally enforceable contracts might be made—could reasonably be said to provide the real substance of the *Tale*’s drama.⁹

To argue for so coldly intellectual an interpretation of the *Franklin’s Tale*, one with so little sense of resolution, is to risk offending all those who read it as a reassuringly self-sufficient fantasy of the ideal, loving marriage—for there is perhaps no tale that readers have been so ready to sentimentalize. Even those critics who have attempted to place the *Tale* in the context of medieval jurisprudence have acknowledged that submitting it to legal analysis might seem ludicrously inappropriate to fiction.¹⁰ Yet medieval narrative is often remarkably forensic in the way it builds plots on quite sharply defined dilemmas—dilemmas that are often partially recognizable from other more typically scholastic discourses, such as those of law or theology. Moreover,

medieval literature as a whole, it seems to me, is frankly addicted to the forms and terms of adversarial disputation in such a way as to threaten to redefine its readership as a technocracy of judicial discretion.¹¹ The legally minded reader of the *Franklin's Tale* can only feel justified by the form of the conundrum that concludes it, for even if the meaning of the *Tale* as a whole amounts to something more than the answer to this riddle, the way in which the question is posed at least sets a standard of intellectual rigor that makes it seem self-indulgent to read the *Tale* simply as a heart-warming fantasy.

In any case, lawyers even today are much more concerned with fiction than most people believe, for not only does most legal argument involve the predication of cases or situations that are often invented with willful arbitrariness, but even those real events that shape the law as so-called leading cases are sometimes so improbably bizarre as to illustrate the Byronic principle that truth is "stranger than fiction". The famous survival-cannibalism case of *R. v. Dudley and Stephens* (1884), for example, is no less fantastic for being true, than any of its reflexes in literary fiction, such as Joseph Conrad's short story "Falk"; and similarly E.P. Evans's remarkable study of the legal liability of animals in the Middle Ages is all the more breathtakingly odd, for being wholly serious, than the peculiar film that it seems to have inspired, *The Hour of the Pig*.¹² It is precisely because law is so characteristically concerned with its own limits that legal discourse seems to contain a narrative drive toward the limits of plausibility—and with it a love of the improbable and the absurd that is sometimes just as rich as that to be found among practitioners of literature.¹³ My purpose here in blurring the distinction between legalistic fiction and legal fictions is not just to justify a reexamination of the *Franklin's Tale* as a problematization of what might seem to be an all too narrowly legal concept, that of contract, but also to suggest that there is a rich and untilled field of analogues to the *Tale* to be found in those scholastic instruments that were designed to have the same purpose—to explore the tension between contract in its legal and in its ethical dimensions.

It has often been argued that the terms of the "humble, wys accord" between Arveragus and Dorigen define an ideal relationship between spouses, in that it substantiates mutual "trouthe" as the self-sufficiently essential principle of marriage—even though, as is less often noted, were "trouthe" to be relied on as a guarantee in this sense, marriage as a social practice would in effect become redundant.¹⁴ In fact, this postnuptial accord is even more sharply at odds with the terms of the marriage contract than even this formulation suggests, as is vigorously pointed out by Fiammetta during the *disputatio* on the analogous situation presented in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* (which may possibly have served as Chaucer's source):

"Voi volete dire che colui niuna liberalità facesse concedendo la moglie, però che di ragione fare giele convenia per lo saramento fatto dalla donna: la

qual cosa saria così, se il saramento tenesse; ma la donna, con ciò sia cosa ch'ella sia membro del marito, o più tosto un corpo con lui, non potea fare quel saramento senza volontà del marito, se'l fece, fu nullo, però che al primo saramento licitamente fatto niuno subseguente puote derogare, e massimamente quelli che per non dovuta cagione non debitamente si fanno."

["You propose that the husband showed no generosity in giving up his wife, since he had to by right, because of the promise made by the wife. That would be the case, if the promise were binding; but the lady, inasmuch as she is part of the husband or rather the same body with him, could not make that promise without the consent of the husband; and if she did, it would be invalid, for no subsequent promise can contravene an earlier promise properly made and especially not those promises made improperly for improper reasons."] ¹⁵

Fiammetta, who shows no shyness about applying legalistic thinking to the situation, makes an explicit appeal to the principle of coverture: a wife alone cannot be party to a contract without her husband's consent because a married couple was regarded for such purposes as a single personality. As her language implies, this distinctively legalistic reasoning was founded on a deeper, more religious sense of the indivisibility of husband and wife, in soul as well as in body. No "saramento" (or in Middle English "serement") that a wife might choose to make can supercede the greater *sacrament* of marriage; and no other obligation can threaten the exclusive carnal unity of spouses who are, by definition, "the same body"—"duo in carne una" (Genesis 2: 24). This imagery perhaps underlies the desire for the destruction of her impossibly divided body that Dorigen expresses in her so-called Complaint.¹⁶ Fiammetta then goes on to suggest that the wife's contract with Aurelius's counterpart, Tarolfo, is invalid for two other much less convincing reasons: first, that her marriage is the prior contract, which might be seen as a reversible argument; and second, that her bargain with Tarolfo is improper, presumably in the sense that it would justify adultery, which is a circular argument, since it appeals to just that notion of the husband's honor that she is trying to justify.

The real problem with applying any of Fiammetta's reasoning to the *Franklin's Tale*—leaving aside the fact that it concerns a story that is not quite the same as the one told by Chaucer—is her assumption that marriage is simply not negotiable, since Arveragus and Dorigen clearly *assume* the right to negotiate it in making their postnuptial agreement in the first place. In late medieval England, people were much more likely to try to attach conditions to marriage than they are now, as Richard Helmholz has shown; and even now, agreements between spouses either before or after marriage are not illegal per se: they are simply "outside the realm of contracts altogether," to quote an English Court of Appeal decision from 1919: "In respect of these promises each house is a domain into which the King's

writ does not seek to run.”¹⁷ Moreover, as I have already suggested, the couple’s “humble, wys accord” could reasonably be interpreted as an attempt to place the terms of the relationship outside that particular legal realm—as an attempt to de-obligate the two parties in favor of a relationship of trust that is by definition unenforceable. Yet, for most people even today, as for Fiammetta, marriage is an unambiguously objective relationship, one that cannot be suspended or redefined even by mutual agreement—a contract like most contracts, in that it can only be terminated, but not renegotiated. To seek to deny or evade the jurisdiction of the law over a legal relationship, even a private one, might seem to be illegal by definition, and it is certainly an ancient principle in common law that no agreement to deny legal jurisdiction can be valid; but it is still possible in some current jurisdictions for parties in certain circumstances to agree to enter relations without being bound by contract, as was established in an English context by the case of *Rose & Frank v. Crompton & Bros Ltd* (1925).¹⁸

What this illustrates, I think, is that legal thought is in this respect more flexible than the seemingly commonsensical position taken by most readers, and represented in the *Filocolo* by Fiammetta—which is to assume that marriage automatically erases any moral or legal obligations that are in conflict with it, even those guaranteed by such explicitly consensual and morally admirable arrangements as that between Arveragus and Dorigen. The confidence in the unproblematic objectivity of marriage so often expressed by readers is certainly counter to the spirit of the opening of the *Franklin’s Tale*, for the “humble, wys accord” is clearly designed to resolve a paradox fundamentally and obviously implicit in marriage—even though orthodox social morality often pretends not to notice it. To quote Thomas Hardy’s Sue Bridehead: “the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation” is perhaps “destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness.”¹⁹ In other words, marriage in essence and by definition transforms consent into constraint, replacing love as the primary condition of a relationship with the rigors of contract. Arveragus, as a worthy practitioner of what used to be called “courtly love,” and of what might less misleadingly be called “aspirational love,” recognizes that the very rigidity of the obligations established by marriage is essentially fatal to the moral and affective autonomy necessary for true love. The weight of these constraints also tends to fall more heavily on women, as Chaucer makes clear, so that if Arveragus is to create any space in their marriage in which Dorigen can continue to express her free consent, he needs to forgo all his prerogatives of “maistrie” in favor of what Chaucer calls “suffrance” (788). This constitutes a much more radical critique of marriage than most modern readers have been prepared to consider, but I have argued elsewhere that it is characteristic of medieval literature, at least before Chaucer, to address questions about marriage in

strikingly energetic and imaginative ways;²⁰ so that there seems to me absolutely no reason not to take seriously the anxieties lying behind the attempt by Arveragus and Dorigen to redefine or rewrite the nature of marriage. It has been all too tempting for scholars to interpret the terms of their accord as an underwriting of marriage, but what it really amounts to is an *unwriting* of marriage, in such a way as to leave the field clear for a more genuinely unprejudiced consideration of the ways in which moral responsibilities are created—even *within*, and not just *by*, marriage.

The validity to the contract between Dorigen and Aurelius has often been summarily dismissed, and on the basis of similarly orthodox, rigidly “Fiammettan” reasoning. It is often argued that Dorigen’s promise was made “in play,” without any intention to enter any legal agreement; that it was purely an oral agreement; and that it was based on the mistaken belief that her conditions were impossible. None of these reasons would have carried much weight in either medieval or modern law. Even though *in theory* the intention to enter legal relations should exist before a contract is made, *in practice* the law has always been reluctant to appeal to so nebulous a criterion as intention. To quote a medieval judge, “a person’s intention shall not be tried, for even the devil can have no knowledge of a person’s intention.”²¹ More recently, *Williston on Contracts* observes that modern courts generally do not allow uncertainty about intention to dilute legal liability, preferring, if necessary, to take an exaggerated view of the extent to which such intentions are consciously legal:

Parties to an informal transaction frequently are not thinking of legal obligations. They intend an exchange, a gift, or to induce action by each other when they make promises, and to make the obligation of such promises depend on the accident of the promisor’s reflection on his legal situation is unfortunate. It may be guessed that where it is stated that an intent to create a legal relation is the test of a contract, the intent is frequently fictitiously assumed [i.e., by the courts]; and that a deliberate promise seriously made is enforced irrespective of the promisor’s views regarding his legal liability.²²

Even though we know from the text that Dorigen is not serious, that she is only speaking “in play,” this would have been difficult to prove in the event, especially given the solemnity of the terms in which her promise is made (989–98). Until as recently as 1845, wagers or bets were regarded as perfectly valid contracts, so that (in theory at least) to be in the habit of making comments such as “I bet you a tenner it’ll be sunny tomorrow,” even in jest, was potentially expensive.²³ As to the objection that Dorigen’s promise was only spoken, this is wholly negligible from a legal point of view: for contracts have never been confined to the written word. Finally,

the argument that Dorigen thought that her conditions were impossible is rendered irrelevant by events. As Richard Firth Green puts it, "while Dorigen's impossible condition [. . .] might be sufficient to void her contract in theory, the simple fact that Aurelius does remove the rocks [. . .] completely undercuts the grounds for any such objection."²⁴ In any case, any attempt by Dorigen to refute the contract on the grounds that she deliberately made conditions that she expected to be frustrated would seem so contemptuous of the law that no lawyer asked to judge her case could be expected to be sympathetic. She has no grounds even for accusing Aurelius of not disclosing the material fact that the removal of the rocks would be possible by magic, for not even Aurelius knew this at the time the contract was made; nor can she argue that her contract is invalid because it is gratuitous or unilateral, because she clearly does have a personal interest in the removal of the Brittany rocks (if not in Boccaccio's winter garden). Anyway, as I have already suggested, lawyers are used to thinking in terms of the seemingly impossible becoming possible: it is precisely because so many situations are dramatically or even comically unforeseeable that the law can never be static.

The point of all this is to show that literary critics cannot rely on the law to make it easy for them to invalidate Dorigen's contract: they might choose not to think of the *Tale* in terms of the concept of legal obligation, but it would be inconsistent to invoke any legalistic principle—such as the absolute status of marriage—as a way of justifying such a choice. It might be possible to refer Dorigen's promise to a different category of analysis, such as rhetoric—since from this point of view, her reference to the Brittany rocks might be taken as an example of *adynaton*, a means of measuring the irremovability of her commitment to Arveragus; but even this argument is rendered inapposite by the *Tale's* recognition from the outset that it is in the nature of aspirational love to achieve "many a labour, many a grete emprise" (732)—in other words, that love tends to live up to its own rhetoric. Moreover, no matter how eager we might be to refer the moral problem to any other discourse that might seem to offer either resolution or evasion more easily than the law, in the end the central dilemma of the *Franklin's Tale* remains uncompromisingly legalistic in the way it is formed and presented, and in these legal terms it *is* a hard question, and not by any means one that can be readily dismissed by reference *to* the law.

The kind of thinking that leads Arveragus to insist on his wife's observation of her contract with Aurelius might seem deeply unmodern—"he who cheats with an oath," as Plutarch put it, "acknowledges that he thinks little of God"—but in some ways it is both more precise and more flexible than much of what has been said about the *Franklin's Tale* recently.²⁵ For example, it has been argued several times now that what the *Tale* presents

is a postmodern-style skepticism about the stability of signs—as if (to convert the proposition into Plutarchan terms) it were God who was guilty of cheating in treacherously changing the terms of the world that people swear by.²⁶ This is merely a blanket pessimism—and a comfortable one at that—for it pretends that “What if . . . ?” is by definition an invalid question. “What if Aurelius actually did make the rocks vanish so that Dorigen was caught in a conflict of obligations?” is not a question about magic or illusion, or an expression of any anxiety about the supervention of events that we thought impossible: it is precisely what it appears to be, a question about morality, and one focused with a precision that many readers seem reluctant to find in any fiction, let alone in that “genial” medieval, chaucer.

In what remains of this chapter I want to draw attention to the existence of other texts in medieval culture that address some of the same questions raised by the *Franklin's Tale*, and that do so in similarly focused and challenging fashion. Of the two texts that I have in mind, one makes audaciously dramatic use of the fictional limit case, while the other directly arises from a real situation that was, in effect, a highly publicized leading case. Both of them raise particular questions about the circumstances in which a marital vow might be abrogated. The first is from a collection of *quaestiones* designed to test the intelligence of students of canon law, a collection that seems to have circulated primarily in Germany, though it probably originated in Bologna. It goes as follows:

Vxoratus graui infirmitate laborans consilium medici habere non potuit nisi sibi suam uxorem subiceret. Vnde cum uxorem ad hoc faciendum rogasset, illa uiri satisfaciens se ei supposuit. Vir curatus eam de adulterio impetit. Queritur an possit.

[A married man suffering with a serious illness is denied the advice of a physician, unless he suborns his wife to sleep with him [the physician]. The husband duly asks his wife to do this and she submits to him [the physician] in order to satisfy her husband. The husband is cured and he then sues his wife for divorce. Discuss whether this is possible.]²⁷

Here we have to accept as a given, that the doctor's intervention is necessary to save the man's life, just as we have to accept the necessity of blood-sacrifice in such stories as *Amis and Amiloun* or Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*. This is the kind of arbitrary *fiat* intrinsic to the practice of hypothesis: it may seem strange, even “morally absurd,” as the *Franklin's Tale* has seemed to some of its critics, but it is a necessary condition of the question being asked. This text is also like the *Franklin's Tale* in that it asks us to consider the circumstances in which the sexual exclusivity essential to the marriage contract can ever justifiably be breached. If Arveragus had given his wife to Aurelius and if she had slept with him—not to save her

husband's life in this case, but to keep her word—would Arveragus, the law-students might have been asked, have been allowed to seek a divorce? Or to put the question differently again: is it possible for a husband and wife to agree not to observe the sexual exclusivity usually implicit in marriage, and if they do so agree, can either of the parties then be held in default for breaching the marital contract? Quite what the students would or should have answered is difficult to say, but the incipient literary qualities of this little examination-question are hard to ignore. Even the legal historian Stephan Kuttner noticed that several of the questions in this collection have what he described as “a surprising flavor of anecdotes or exempla”—the strangeness of the hypothesis, in other words, only adding to the flavor of the story.²⁸ Another question elsewhere in the collection concerns the case of a prince who goes on pilgrimage and for whom an imposter returns, which is an interesting anticipation of the story of Martin Guerre.²⁹ It is perhaps even possible that the *quaestio* cited here might have furnished that lapsed law-student Boccaccio with at least a germ of the tale of the winter-garden that he tells in both the *Filocolo* and the *Decameron*.

My second text is even more complex and provocative. This is the final question-and-answer from the collection of forty-two theological problems collected by Heloise for her husband Peter Abelard—the *Problemata Heloissae*. In the last of these, Heloise asks, “whether anyone can sin in something that he does by permission of, or even at the command of, their lord.”³⁰ Abelard's reply makes it clear that he takes the context of this question to be marriage; that the Lord in question is God and that what Heloise is asking for is a defense of marital sexuality. Yet, as Michael Clanchy has pointed out, the lord that Heloise refers to might equally well be a husband: “at a personal level,” he points out, “this was the dilemma Heloise had set out in her letters to Abelard; she had obeyed him in everything, right or wrong, and this was why she was both guilty and innocent.” Interpreted like this, Heloise's question is not so much about the value of sexuality in marriage, as it is about the scope for individual moral liability within a mutual relationship such as marriage. From this point of view, it borders on the question of whether Dorigen would have been guilty in giving herself to Aurelius had her husband decided that she should. For Heloise, the issue also has a deeper relevance than might immediately appear, for what worries her is the fear that in agreeing at Abelard's instigation to enter a convent without any sincere vocation for religion, she is guilty of the sin of hypocrisy or bad faith. Underlying that in turn is her conviction that their marriage was in no sense ended, not even in this world, by Abelard's castration; and that she should never have consented to any arrangement of their lives that infringed the prerogatives of their marriage, as the prior and

higher contract. The question is, can Heloise really be bound by even a voluntary agreement to dissolve the normal conditions of her marriage, if marriage is, as Fiammetta argued, a contract that supercedes all others, even mutually agreed revisions of its terms? Heloise's situation is just the kind of limit case that troubles most of the fundamental categories that we live by—her relationship with Abelard is a marriage but not a sexual relationship, a bond of consent but not of physical companionship: in short, a problem so extreme as to look merely ingenious, if debated simply as a legal problem.³¹ It is perhaps only a small exaggeration to suggest that Heloise is occupied with a situation that is as impossible to deal with as the disappearance of all the rocks, for Dorigen, from the shores of Abelard's native Brittany.

Abelard's reply to Heloise is almost perversely orthodox, a disquisition on the propriety of marital sex that significantly does not touch on his own ambiguous state as a married, but unmanned, man. As he seemingly fails to notice, he himself is living hardly within the pattern of reciprocal obligations that he identifies as essential to marriage as a means of redistributing culpability away from individuals within it. In denying Heloise's culpability as a married woman, he is also effectively denying her the capability, as a loving woman, to take moral responsibility for her own actions—in a way that Arveragus does not. Michael Clanchy suggests that "perhaps [Abelard] had failed to see what Heloise was getting at, or he saw this only too clearly and he had no wish to get involved in personal acrimony." Given his history of calamities, Abelard might be forgiven for ducking the issues, but we have no such excuse. To put it briefly, the complexities of defining any philosophy of obligation are built into the *Franklin's Tale*, and so prominently as to make it essential for us to take a detailed interest in the forms and practices of those intellectual disciplines that sought to address these issues in the Middle Ages, such as the law; and, in the context of such an investigation, we should also be prepared to give much more extended consideration to the representatives and relatives of that fundamental but too little studied medieval form with which the *Franklin's Tale* is so firmly linked by its conclusion—that is, the *quaestio*. In particular, it might be rewarding for the study of Chaucer to examine the ways in which models of gender and sexual behavior were accommodated in the mechanisms of intellectual disputation in the Middle Ages.³² Equipped in this way, we might be better able to face the *quaestio* at the end of the *Franklin's Tale* with the rigor that it seems to demand.³³

Notes

1. On the likelihood that the name is a pseudonym, see Peter Dronke, "Andreas Capellanus," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 51–63.

2. *Andreae Capellani Regii Francorum De Amore Libri* res, ed. E. Trojel (Copenhagen, 1892; reprinted Munich: Eidos, 1964); *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed./trans. P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982). It is perhaps worth remarking that for all the importance of Andreas's text to contemporary literary criticism, there is actually no up-to-date critical edition available. Trojel's is the last attempt at a collated text, but his methods are questionable, and he was in any case working with only a small proportion of the manuscripts now known. See the list by Alfred Karnein, *De amore in volkssprachlicher Literatur: Untersuchung zur Andreas-Capellanus-Rezeption in Mittelalter und Renaissance* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1985), pp. 273–283.
3. Rüdiger Schnell, *Andreas Capellanus: Zur Rezeption des römischen und kanonischen Rechts in "De Amore"* (Munich: Fink, 1982); Neil Cartledge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100–1300* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 24–32.
4. In the Middle Ages, the *quaestio* was (along with lectures and disputations) one of the main forms in which teaching was presented in the universities; and since *quaestiones* were recorded and collected it might also be regarded as a literary element or genre. On its history, see Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic "Quaestio Disputata": With Special Emphasis on its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1993), especially chapters 1–2.
5. All references to Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
6. The reference is to Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (London: Fontana, 1986; reprinted 1991). A more skeptical assessment of law's moral and intellectual coherence is expressed by H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), and see especially the confrontation with Dworkin in the Postscript to the 2nd edition (1994), pp. 238–276; but, even for Hart (p. 6) "the most prominent general feature of law at all times and places is that its existence means that certain kinds of human conduct are no longer optional, but in some sense obligatory."
7. See, for example, E.J. Mathewson, "The Illusion of Morality in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Medium Ævum* 52 (1983): 27–37; Felicity Riddy, "Engendering Pity in the *Franklin's Tale*," in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and all her sect*, edited by Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 54–71; Mary R. Bowman, "'Half as She Were Mad': Dorigen in the Male World of the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 27 (1993): 239–251; Sandra J. McEntire, "Illusions and Interpretation in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 31 (1996): 154 [145–163]. By contrast, Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), p. 92: "Arveragus relinquishes his own claims so that she [Dorigen] may meet the ones she has created."
8. See F. Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols., 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 2: 405–407 and 434–435. See also the Parson's Tale, X. 930: "eek, as seith the decree, a womman that is wyf, as longe as she is a wyf, she hath noon auctoritee to swere ne to bere witnesse withoute leve of hir housbonde, that is hire lord."

9. On the increasing importance of legalistic thinking to English society during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The growth of legal consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). For the particular relevance of a "legal consciousness" to Middle English literature, see Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). Less focused, but still relevant in the context, is the collection of essays in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca, GA and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).
10. Alan T. Gaylord found such research "intriguing" but concluded that it "provides more recreation than relevance": "The Promises in the Franklin's Tale," *English Literary History* 31 (1964): 357 [331–365]. This is a point to which is Richard Firth Green is sensitive, but resistant—"Like Gaylord, I am quite aware that there is something more than a little ludicrous about trying to drag a literary character like Dorigen through the courts, but all the same the exercise is far easier to defend than, say, asking how many children Lady Macbeth had." (*A Crisis of Truth*, p. 294).
11. Helen Cooper argues that the *Canterbury Tales*, at least, "participates in that fascination with opposites that characterizes the Middle Ages, and that found expression in the debates of the law courts, royal and baronial councils, Parliament, and the schools, in the entire academic method established by such works as Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and in debate poetry." See her introduction to *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. 1, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 1–22; p. 14. For disputation in medieval literature more generally, see Hans Walther, *Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich: Beck, 1920), reprinted with supplementary material by P.G. Schmidt (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1984); W.A. Davenport, "Patterns in Middle English Dialogues," in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. E.D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron and Joseph S. Wittig (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), pp. 127–145; Thomas L. Reed, Jr., *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990); Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Georgiana Donavin, Carol Poster and Richard Utz, *Medieval Forms of Argument: Disputation and Debate*, in *Disputatio* 5 (2002).
12. See A.W. Brian Simpson, *Leading Cases in the Common Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Joseph Conrad, "Falk," first published in *Typhoon and Other Stories* (1903), reprinted in *Typhoon and Other Tales*, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Simpson, *Cannibalism and the Common Law: The Story of the Tragic Last Voyage of the "Mignonette" and the Strange Legal Proceedings to Which It Gave Rise* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984; reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986);

- E.P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906; reprinted London: Faber, 1987); *The Hour of the Pig* (1992), directed by Leslie Megahey.
13. This love of the improbable among jurists is one of the reasons why Johan Huizinga found it possible to include a chapter "Play and Law" (cap. 4) in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (first published in Dutch: 1938; Boston: Beacon, 1955). Yet Huizinga's notion of play is performative rather than intellectual—and, in this context, almost inevitably trivializing.
 14. See, most famously, G.L. Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," *Modern Philology* 9 (1911–1912): 435–467 and *Chaucer and his Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915), pp. 201–210; other "optimistic" readers of the Tale include: John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 164; A.M. Kearney, "Truth and Illusion in *The Franklin's Tale*," *Essays in Criticism* 19 (1969): 245–253; Velma Bourgeois Richmond, "Patience in Adversitee: Chaucer's Presentation of Marriage," *Viator* 10 (1979): 351 [323–354]; Kathryn Jacobs, "The Marriage Contract of the *Franklin's Tale*: The Remaking of Society," *Chaucer Review* 20 (1985): 142 [132–143].
 15. *Sources and Analogues*: "The Franklin's Tale," ed. Robert R. Edwards, p. 234 [pp. 211–165]. I have omitted a redundant "because" from Edwards's translation. *Il Filocolo* is edited by Antonio Enzo Quaglio, in vol. 1 of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–1983) and trans. Donald Cheney and Thomas G. Bergin, in the Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B, vol. 43 (New York and London: Garland, 1985). On the complex issue of Chaucer's use of Boccaccio for the *Franklin's Tale*, see Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 233–234; N.S. Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love: A Comparative Study of "The Decameron" and "The Canterbury Tales"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 251–269; Robert R. Edwards, "Source, Context, and Cultural Translation in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Modern Philology* 94 (1996): 141–162; Dominique Battles, "Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and Boccaccio's *Filocolo* Reconsidered," *Chaucer Review* 34 (1999): 38–59.
 16. The implications of the scriptural metaphor are worked out in medieval literature with a frequency that verges on obsessiveness: see, for example, *Les Demandes d'Amour*, edited by Leslie Brook, in *Two Late Medieval Love Treatises: Heloise's "Art d'Amour" and a Collection of "Demandes d'Amour," from British Library Royal MS 16 F II*, *Medium Ævum Monographs*, n. s. 16 (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1993), no. 71, p. 89; Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 119 and 123 (London: EETS, 1901, 1903), ll. 1741–1868.
 17. See Richard H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 47–57. The case

- before the Court of Appeal was *Balfour v. Balfour* (1919) 2 KB 578, quoted by P.S. Atiyah, in *An Introduction to the Law of Contract*, 5th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 156.
18. See Atiyah, pp. 153 and 320; and, with reference to American law, S. Williston, *Treatise on the Law of Contracts*, 3rd edn., 18 vols. (Mount Kisco, NY: Baker, Voorhis and Co., 1957–1978), 1: 40–41.
 19. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895; reprinted London and Melbourne: Dent, 1985), p. 256.
 20. Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage* (see above, n.4).
 21. Chief Justice Bryan in *Les Reports des Cases en Ley [Edward II–Henry VIII]*, abridged by John Maynard et al. (London: George Sawbridge, 1678–1680; reprinted Abingdon: Professional Books, 1979–1981), 17 Edw. 4, pasc. 2: cited by Green, p. 315.
 22. Williston, I, p. 39. Cf. Atiyah, p. 153.
 23. The decisive legislation is the Gaming Act (1845), section 18: see Atiyah, p. 338.
 24. Green, p. 323.
 25. Plutarch, *Lysander*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library 80 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1916), 8.4, pp. 252–253.
 26. W. Bryant Bachman, Jr., “To Make Illusion: The Philosophy of Magic and the Magic of Philosophy in the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 12 (1977): 55–67; Anthony E. Luengo, “Magic and Illusion in the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Journal of English & Germanic Philology* 77 (1978): 1–16; R.A. Shoaf, “The *Franklin’s Tale*: Chaucer and Medusa,” *Chaucer Review* 21 (1986): 274–290; Sandra J. McEntire, “Illusions and Interpretation”; see above, n. 6.
 27. Gérard Fransen, “Les ‘questiones’ des canonistes (III): *Quaestiones Bambergenses*,” *Traditio* 19 (1963): 516–531, no. 25, p. 523.
 28. Stephan Kuttner, “Bernardus Compostellanus Antiquus,” *Traditio* 1 (1943): 277–340, n. 20a, p. 324.
 29. For Martin Guerre, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).
 30. *Problemata Heloissae*, no. 41, PL 178.723–730: “Utrum aliquis in eo quod facit a domino sibi concessum, vel etiam jussum, peccare possit quaerimus. Solution Abælardi: Quod si, ut oportet, verum concedatur, quaestione gravi pulsamur, quomodo conjuges, vel in antiquo populo, vel in novo, carnalem concupiscentiam exercentes, in eo peccare dicantur, unde in posteris peccatum originale transfundunt . . .” (PL capitalizes “domino”—perhaps misleadingly.) See further M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 280.
 31. Castration after marriage actually provides the material for a poetic *quaestio* that fully deserves to be described as “merely ingenious,” the *Causa viri ementulati et eius uxoris petentis fieri diuortium*, now extant only in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS nouv. acq. lat. 1544. Although the legal problem that this poem addresses is entirely real, the text itself is “largely a cento,

- with lines drawn from the Bible and from classical and medieval sources,” as its editor points out: see Marvin L. Colker, *Mediaevalia et Humanistica* 12 (1958): 11–15. See also Walther, *Das Streitgedicht*, pp. 135–136.
32. Felicity Riddy (“Engendering pity,” p. 55, and n11, p. 67) asserts that the *questio* is fundamentally at odds with the female voice in medieval culture: “The scholastic *quaestio*, as a method of argumentation employed in a system of higher education open only to men, is in this sense masculine.” This is true only as a rule—a rule from which the detailed realities of medieval culture frequently depart. Medieval literature frequently employs female figures (such as Fiammetta) in formal disputation; and female authors (such as Christine de Pizan) were perfectly capable of choosing to engage in it: on this, see Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995). In any case, as I have argued, the interconnection between medieval literature and the intellectual tradition represented by the *quaestio* is pervasive and profound.
 33. I am grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, the Seminar für Lateinische Philologie des Mittelalters at the University of Freiburg and to University College Dublin for making it possible for me to take research-leave in Freiburg during 2002–2003, during which this essay was completed.

CHAPTER 8

SOME NEW THING: *THE FLOURE* AND *THE LEAFE* AND THE CULTURAL SHIFT IN THE ROLE OF THE POET IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Helen Cooney

Précis: This chapter makes the case that *The Floure* and *the Leafe* contains a radical new configuration of the ideals of love and chastity. It also shows how the poem engages with philosophical, aesthetic, and sociohistorical issues in a new and distinctive way.

I

It is a truth universally acknowledged that fifteenth-century English poetry has had a very bad critical press—that for a long time it has been the subject of sustained and often venomous critical abuse. In the 1950s, we had C.S. Lewis speaking of the history of fifteenth-century English literature as “a history of decay”;¹ R.F. Green’s remark in 1980 to the effect that English literature of the fifteenth century constituted a litany of “servile platitudes”² can only have been a reflex of decades of critical neglect and even ignorance. As recently as 1987, David Lawton called fifteenth-century English writing “a literary prolepsis of the Slough of Despond.”³ Lawton asks, seemingly incredulously: “can a period of such convulsive historical instability really have produced writing so monotonous and drab?”⁴ His answer is a resounding “yes!” Dullness is, he claims, the hallmark of this writing—in part assumed dullness, in order to influence princes and the public world, and in large part, real. There was dullness before truth and authority, dullness before love, and dullness before

Fortune and divine providence. Dullness, willed, self-conscious, and ostentatious, was all around.⁵ Then, just one year later, in 1988, there appeared Lois Ebin's study of fifteenth-century English and Scottish poetry.⁶ Ebin, banishing all notions of dullness, claimed for the poetry from Lydgate to Skelton the qualities of illumination and enlightenment. The characteristic vocabulary of even the driveling monk Lydgate is found to be characterized by terms like "enlumine," "adorne," "embellish," "aureate," "sugred." Ebin believes that, like the sun's intense light, poetry in this period seeks to transform common matter into works that are fairer than the ordinary and more enduring. She argues that the process of poetic illumination has power to dispel the darkness of the human mind and draw it to virtue.

And so to the 1990s and early years of this century. These have been very kind to the poets and poetry of the fifteenth century. They saw the publication of an important collection of essays, edited by Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone,⁷ which stresses how readers need urgently to adjust our romantic and post-romantic conceptions of literature if we are to appreciate the work of these writers. There was also Derek Pearsall's anthology of poetry from Chaucer to Spenser,⁸ and a companion volume of essays which gave hitherto unwonted "air space" to the work of fifteenth-century writers.⁹ Perhaps the postmodern sensibility is suited to appreciate the quality of absorbed self-reflexiveness and the new poetics to which this gave rise in a way that the postromantic sensibility of Lewis—and indeed even Lawton—was not.

At any rate, it is no longer a novelty to speak well of fifteenth-century English literature. And in this chapter, I wish simply to continue this felicitous trend in critical thought by looking at a truly "little booke" of less than 600 lines, *The Floure and the Leafe*, and giving it the kind of scrupulous attention and examination which the academy seems at last to have realized poems of this kind can bear. It may seem somewhat odd, however—even perverse—that I have chosen to take up the cause of a poem whose rehabilitation began long before the 1990s, and as far back as 1962, with Derek Pearsall's edition of the poem.¹⁰ This edition is a work of impeccable scholarship, a work which accords the poem all the serious analysis it deserves. However, while valuing it immensely, I believe it does not go far enough in its appreciation of either the content or context of *The Floure and the Leafe*. This essay is designed to build upon the work of Pearsall by opening up for discussion hitherto unexplored aspects of the poem.

The poem is a courtly allegory based on the conventional courtly game which came into England from France whereby courtiers would declare that their allegiance in matters of love was either to the flower or the leaf. The flower might be preferred on grounds of its superior beauty, for example,

the leaf because of its more enduring quality.¹¹ Our poem has all the “paraphernalia” of a dream-vision—it takes place in springtime, it involves a *locus amoenus*, and so on. Yet, strictly speaking, it is not one. The lady of the poem cannot sleep and gets up in the early morning and makes her way to a pleasant arbor. From there she sees firstly a company of ladies dressed in white, wearing chaplets of woodbine, laurel or agnus castus on their heads. The ladies are then joined by a company of knights, also dressed in white, who joust for over an hour before joining with the ladies to dance and sing, some of love. This is the company of the leaf (134–322). Next our narrator sees the company of the flower. These ladies and knights are dressed in green and they wear chaplets of flowers on their heads. They do special reverence to the daisy (323–53). The conclusion of the narrative describes an extraordinary rapprochement between the two companies. While the followers of the leaf wisely take shelter at noontide under an oak tree, the followers of the flower dance in the midst of the plain in bright sunlight; however, the flowers which adorn the followers of the latter company soon wither under the heat of the sun; then, a rainstorm comes which drenches the knights and ladies of the flower, and their situation is lamentable—a token, in symbolic terms, of their inferior status. But then, in an extraordinarily “friendly” gesture, the company of the leaf feel great “routh and pite” (376) for the company of the flower, to the extent that their queen takes the queen of the company of the flower by the hand, addressing her as “suster” (387–8) and vows to help comfort her “disease” (377). The knights of the two companies then join hands (400–01), and the knights of the leaf cut down great boughs with which to make a fire which will dry the sodden garments of the followers of the flower (404–6). Finally, these knights gather herbs and leaves, some to cure “blisters,” others to be eaten by the followers of the flower in order to restore health to them (407–13). The two companies then join together and process past the arbor where the narrator has been sitting. A mysterious lady-exegete immediately appears and explains that Diana is the queen of the company of the leaf, Flora the queen of the company of the flower. She declares the leaf to be superior to the flower—its leaves are everlasting, while the flower lasts but a little space. Moreover, the followers of the flower are associated with dancing and jousting and idle deeds, and those of the leaf with chivalrous activity and business. She herself is a follower of the leaf (414–584). And thus concludes the action of the poem.

The newness of this poem lies, in the first instance, in its radical reconfiguration of the relation between chastity and love, so that they are seen to be complementary rather than opposed, as in the love-allegories of the “High” Middle Ages, in which love invariably held “constant war . . . with chastity and with Diana.”¹² Here, however (as Pearsall was the first to recognize),

"Diana leads a company which includes faithful lovers as well as maidens [and] even those who wear chaplets of agnus castus are chaste lovers rather than dedicated virgins."¹³ The delighted breaking down here of the antithesis between chastity and love is reinforced by the poem's elaborate color-symbolism, and it is through color-symbolism that the poet initially adumbrates her new vision of the relationship between chastity and love.¹⁴ Hence, the ladies of the leaf are dressed "in surcotes white of velvet"(141); but these are "set" with green "emerauds"(144); and finally, the robes of the company of the leaf are garnished not only with pearls and diamonds but also with "rubies red"(149). The colors of the company of the leaf are, then, white, green, and red. Turning to the knights and ladies of the flower, *these* wear mantels of "greene"(329), but the chaplets which they wear on their heads are "[m]ade of goodly floures, white and red" (331). Hence the colors associated with the company of the flower are precisely those associated with the leaf: green, white, and red. The poet of the *Floure and the Leafe* drew this precise color-symbolism directly from Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, and the account there of the worship of the daisy. Chaucer's version of the worship of the daisy was much more than a simple imitation of French "marguerite" poetry as found in the work of Machaut, Deschamps, and others. Rather, it was part of an extremely complex dialectic in which he pointedly located the daisy in a pivotal position with respect to the two (opposed and opposing) flowers which dominated the *Roman de la Rose*—that is, the rose itself but also the narcissus. The rose is of course omnipresent in the *Roman*, but the myth of Narcissus is set at the opening of the vision and a measure of its importance lies in the fact that it has the distinction of being the only myth to be told in its entirety in the entire poem. The crucial fact to grasp—and it was clearly grasped by the author of *The Floure and the Leafe*—is that it was its color-symbolism which lent the daisy such unique significance in Chaucer's thought and in the allegory of the *Prologue* to the *Legend*. On the one hand, Chaucer found in the "bright red rose" of the *Roman* a symbol of unbridled sexuality;¹⁵ on the other, in the white and green narcissus, he had an emblem of the absolute denial of love and sexuality. Chaucer had the genius to see that the daisy, specifically with respect to its colors, had power to mediate metaphorically and conceptually between these two extremes. The daisy has white petals—and indeed, a green stem and leaves—but the white petals are uniformly tipped with deepest red. It would be inappropriate here to delve into the profound significance which this had for Chaucer's understanding and representation of "fyn lovynge."¹⁶ It is sufficient for our purposes to note that it adumbrated a reconciliation of love and chastity—a mean position which had the potential to displace the antagonisms that existed between the two in the writings on

amour par amour of previous centuries. The poet of *The Floure and the Leafe*, in associating all three colors—albeit in significantly different proportions—with both her companies, was following Chaucer and insinuating the radical suggestion that the flowers of the leaf and Diana represent *loving chastity* and the followers of the flower and Flora, *chaste love*.

II

However, while it is vitally important to recognize that the poet of *The Floure and the Leafe* adds to the traditional courtly game a moral dimension and perspective that is entirely new, I suggest there is a great deal more to the poem than this. Using the poem as a kind of metonymy for fifteenth-century courtly allegory in general, I shall attempt to show how, in addition, it has new and important philosophical, aesthetic, and sociohistorical dimensions which have gone unrecognized for far too long. It is the last of these—the sociohistorical—which is intended as the chief focus of this essay, but I feel it is essential to begin with a brief exposition with what I believe to be the subtlety of the poem's *philosophical* aspect. For notwithstanding the successful rehabilitation of fifteenth-century poetry that has recently taken place in recent years, one charge against the fifteenth century—that, in terms of the history of ideas, the period was “a blank,” and that, just as “English philosophers of the fifteenth century are almost unknown,” the poetry of the period is void of new ideas¹⁷—is a ghost that has not yet been laid to rest. Johan Huizinga spoke specifically of the “atrophy of thought” that he believed to be characteristic of late medieval culture in Northern Europe.¹⁸ Now it may seem absurd to suggest that the elegant and courtly allegory that is *The Floure and the Leafe* actually has a philosophical dimension. However, there is a powerful, *if a priori*, piece of evidence which might well be adduced for this. It comes in the form of the following three lines from Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*:

But natheles, ne wene nat that I make
In preysing of *the flour again the leef*,
No more than of *the corn again the sheef*. (F 188–90; emphases added)

Chaucer here posits an analogy between the relationship between flower and leaf and corn and sheaf—an analogy which, to my knowledge, has never been examined. It is indeed something of a puzzle: unlike fruit and chaff, say, corn and sheaf are the same substance.¹⁹ Chaucer has set us a conundrum, and I suggest the answer to it lies in the commonplace medieval distinction between essence and existence.²⁰ Essence (approximating, in medieval thought, to form) was said by the followers of Aristotle to constitute

pure being and the eternal component of the thing; existence, on the other hand (approximating to matter) was the finite, transitory, aspect of the thing. The difference between the two was spoken of as one between things that are eternal, on the one hand (essence), and things that come into being and pass away, on the other (existence).²¹ Now let us return to our poem and think of the evergreen laurel leaf (the laurel, like the bay, was in literary tradition, deemed eternal) and the flower, subject to time and decay, coming into being and passing away. The analogy between essence and existence, or form and matter, and the relationship in this poem between the leaf and the flower is startlingly suggestive. But it is even more pointed than this. For essence and existence were said to be “distinguishable but not separable,” and the difference between them, “a distinction without a difference.”²² The author of *The Floure and the Leafe* has translated this philosophical idea precisely into the dénouement of the action of her poem, when the companies of flower and leaf join together in a harmonious rapprochement that had never appeared in courtly literature before, so that by the end of the poem, as they ride off together, in friendly fashion, with joined hands, they are indeed “distinguishable but not separable,” the distinction between them being “a distinction without a difference.”

Of course there remains a clear hierarchy between the two companies and the conditions they represent. Clearly, business and the pursuit of honor are preferable to “idleness” and the pursuit of pleasure (533–9). Just as for the philosophers of the Middle Ages, essence—the eternal—is always prior and superior to existence—the transitory—so the followers of the leaf are in the position of being unharmed by wind or rough weather. Moreover, the company of the leaf include representatives of chivalric prowess. They also include the figures of the Nine Worthies, as the mysterious lady-exegete explains to our poet (502–32). Yet even at this point in the poem (it is close to the end), when, with the explication of the action by the mysterious lady-commentator, the distinction between the two companies seems to be coming into sharper focus, the impulse toward the concept of interrelationship continues to be felt. For while the Nine Worthies are represented here as followers of the leaf and hence are associated with essence and the eternal and unchanging, the audience of the poem, familiar with these figures from the literature of the previous century, would recall that there, they were associated with the *Ubi Sunt* motif—with earthly transience and even, in one case, the power of death.²³ Hierarchy, and within it, the superiority of essence to existence, was a fundamental part of this philosophical concept, and it remains an important element in the allegory of *The Floure and the Leafe*. But so too does the idea of coexistence and mutuality. In this way, the decorative courtly poem accurately mirrors the core of the philosophical concept. At any rate, it

seems to me that the three lines quoted above from the *Prologue* to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, with their analogy between corn and sheaf and flower and leaf prompted the poet of *The Floure and the Leafe* to think of the relationship between her two central emblems as one between form and matter, or more precisely, essence and existence, and that Chaucer's lines therefore constitute no less than the genesis of our poem. The author of the fifteenth-century poem, in representing the relationship between her two companies in a totally novel way—as two things which “cannot be used interchangeably but are not distinct entities”²⁴—is cleverly and painstakingly drawing out to the full a philosophical significance only hinted at in Chaucer. As he professed merely to come “glenyng” (F 75) after the poets of the marguerite, I suggest that our poet has come gleanng after the significance of Chaucer's baffling analogy, has understood the enigma and given it full and quite brilliant poetic expression. Chaucer is very much, to use James Simpson's term, a “remembered presence”²⁵ in *The Floure and the Leafe*, but I believe this poem can also claim a significant place in the canon of English literature in its own right.

It may seem overly subtle to claim that a philosophical *topos* is an important part of a poem as delicate and courtly a poem as *The Floure and the Leafe*, yet it ought to be noted that the concluding part of the poem is sprinkled with terms from scholastic theology concerning just this issue. The first of these is the term “propertie” (557), for a property was a *modus essendi*—that which allows a thing to be conceived as this or that being.²⁶ The next significant term is “simple of nature” (560). The entire essence-existence duality arose out of the belief that only God himself comprised a *simple* substance, containing no such duality; the final term with scholastic connotations is “well-conditioned” (581), for “condition” was simply the term for a state of being (as a verb it means “to be essential to”) and is therefore a fundamental concept in metaphysics and ontology. A final proof, as it were, that the poem does indeed have a philosophical dimension, is to be found in its final stanza:

O little booke, thou art so unconnyng,
How darst thou put thyself in prees for drede?
It is wonder that thou wexest not rede,
Sith that thou sost ful lite who shall behod
Thy rude langage, full boistously unfold. (591–55)

This stanza has all the appearance of the humility-*topos* characteristic of the conventional envoi (compare the envoys to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, before it, and Skelton's *Garland of Laurel*, after it, for example). Yet what is distinctive about it is the precise image of a blushing (“rede”) book.

The allusion to blushing suggests nothing so much as *self-consciousness* and it is my intention to suggest that *The Floure and the Leafe* engages with thematic, ontological, and formal issues in highly self-conscious manner. More than that, however, the image of a blushing book refers right back to the opening section of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. There, the relationship between poetry and philosophy is addressed openly, as Lady Philosophy berates and then banishes the poetical Muses from the bedside of Boethius, whereupon these representatives of the art of poetry flee and blush for shame.²⁷ The effect of the allusion to this in *The Floure and the Leafe* is quite bold, managing to suggest, through its use of the *diminutio*-convention, that this particular book has no need to blush as it has articulated its concerns in a way which effortlessly synthesises poetry and philosophy.

Even now, however, we have not yet done with this poet's subtle negotiations of Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* and its relation to the essence/existence issue. I believe that the author of *The Floure and the Leafe* works in the end to remake Chaucer's use of the tripartite colour-symbolism of the daisy in a radical new way. Dante, in the *Commedia*, symbolizes the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity as white, green, and red, respectively:

Tre donne in giro dalla destra rota
 Venian danzando: l'una tanto rossa
 Ch'a pena for a dentro al foco nota;
 L'altra come se le carni e l'ossa
 fossero state di smeraldo fatte;
 La terza pareva neve teste mossa; (*Purgatorio*, xxix.121–6)

[Three ladies came dancing in a round at the right wheel, one so red that she would hardly have been noted in the fire, another as if the flesh and bones had been of emerald, the third seeming like new-fallen snow.]²⁸

There is an extraordinary congruence between the systems of thought in Chaucer and Dante which suggests that this passage may have inspired Chaucer's sense of the significance of the threefold color-symbolism of the daisy. If Dante's important color-symbolism did indeed lie behind Chaucer's professed worship of the daisy in the *Prologue* and his attempt, by means of it, to adumbrate a new vision of "fyn amor" as consisting of passionate yet virtuous love, Chaucer nevertheless goes on subtly yet decisively to deconstruct this optimistic symbolism. He shows how, for instance, the bright red is associated with "gledly desir," and his own, apparently chaste, worship of Alceste and the daisy with the rape of Europa.²⁹ I submit that the author of *The Floure and the Leafe* saw that in

Chaucer, the important color-symbolism of the daisy did indeed ultimately figure forth an ideal union of virtues, but also that she has consequently reinstated Dante's optimistic vision, through her harmonious inclusion of all three colors in both her companies, and most of all, in her closing representation of the intermingling of these two companies. Their indistinguishability and wholeness at the close of the vision may even, if one may posit this poet's knowledge of Dante,³⁰ gesture anagogically toward God whose essence, uniquely, *is* His existence.³¹ The joining of the leaf to the flower, essence to existence, in the "harmonious rapprochement" of the poem's dénouement gestures toward the fact that while Chaucer's *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* is indeed a powerful "remembered presence" in this poem, nevertheless this poet ultimately wishes her readers to recall Dante, and to have the reader of her "little booke" practice what Derrida, recalling Nietzsche, called an "active forgetfulness" (in this case, of Chaucer himself), in order (to adapt a phrase from the *King's Quair*) "to make room for a new thing."³²

III

I should like to turn next to address the new esthetic which I believe is being expressed through this poem. One of the chief charges brought by Johan Huizinga against the verbal and visual arts of the late Middle Ages was that they confused "the essential" and "the accidental," the result being what he termed an "abuse of detail."³³ This love of ornamentation, apparently for its own sake, has been the chief charge laid at the door of fifteenth-century English poetry and is perhaps the hardest to explain away. Indeed, on the face of it, the poet of *The Floure and the Leafe* is guilty of just such "confusion" and "abuse," as the essence of things appears to be overwhelmed by description of superficial ornament. Details of dress (we are painstakingly informed, at one point, of the contemporary habit of sewing jewels onto the seams of rich garments [142-4]), and nuances of gesture—accidents, all—appear to be foregrounded at the expense of what Huizinga and others would deem true essentials.

However, while it can be said with confidence that throughout the "High" Middle Ages, it was the universal or transferred sense of an allegory which was seen to be essential, while the literal or proper sense constituted the merely accidental, it is also a fact that—for good or ill—the fifteenth century saw a significant alteration in this model of allegorical writing, with concrete, individuating detail being privileged in a new way. Yet the view of Huizinga and others that this widespread shift in esthetics in fifteenth-century allegory is indicative of artistic *decadence* is altogether anachronistic, since it fails to take account of the massive cultural changes which were taking place in fifteenth-century Europe. For in the course of the fifteenth

century, there was an increasing empiricism in all areas of life and thought, which reflected, amongst other things, the nascent but rapidly growing influence of humanism. The belief that "the individual transcends its essence" had been found as early as the thirteenth century, in the work of the philosopher, Duns Scotus.³⁴ Moreover, the esthetic consequence of his concept of *haecitas*—"thisness" or an individuating property—the possibility of "being enthralled by multiplicity," is to be seen in thirteenth-century Gothic art. However, as Umberto Eco so cogently points out, this "pointed in a direction that Scotus and his contemporaries were unable to follow."³⁵ Eco also notes that the nominalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries "failed to follow through" the consequences of their empiricism specifically "for aesthetic theory."³⁶ This can only have been because the philosophy of Aristotle, notwithstanding the ripples caused by the nominalist movement, remained wholly dominant in Western European thought and culture. As Eco points out, an art in which there was a delight in multiplicity, a privileging the concrete and the individual did not achieve full expression "until the *late* medieval period, with the miniatures and paintings of France and Flanders." I believe that this fifteenth-century flowering was not due to residual influence of nominalism, but rather to the advent of humanism³⁷ and its esthetics of particularity, in both language and idea. One of the consequences of this cultural shift was a significant alteration in the configuration of the essential and the accidental in allegorical writing, with concrete, physical detail now being accorded considerably greater respect and significance than ever before. Hence the privileging of the individual object, the proliferation of concrete detail, and the whole process of individuation which is so clearly exemplified in fifteenth-century works such as *The Floure and the Leafe*, as well as *Kingis Quair* of James I, Dunbar's *Golden Targe*, not to mention the *Assembly of Ladies*. The love of detail reflects not a confusion between the essential and the accidental, or a literary decadence, as Huizinga and others have thought, but rather, a whole new cultural climate which was intimately related to humanism and gave birth to a new esthetic.

However, while a profound shift in the cultural climate and in esthetics may well be the primary reason why details of jewels, dress, and other concrete things occupy such a significant place in *The Floure and the Leafe*, there is a distinct possibility that, in this particular allegory, the privileging of such "accidentals" may have a second, and related, rationale—namely, this poet's desire to create a distinctively *courtly* ethos. It is, after all, niceties of etiquette and courtly behavior of the highest and most nuanced kind which effect the reconciliation between the companies of leaf and flower at the poem's climax and thus serve to make the poet's chief allegorical point concerning the union between love and chastity. If one were to try to find

a close literary model for this poem, with its central use of the processional motif, it might well be Petrarch's *Trionfi*. However, as the moral scheme of things has been so wholly reconfigured here in new terms, it approximates neither to Petrarch's Triumph of Chastity nor to his Triumph of Love. More than anything, it seems to me to come closest to his Triumph of Courtesy. It is surely the poem's emphasis on *manners* (however skillfully synthesized, as here, with *matter*) which distinguishes the dénouement of *The Floure and the Leafe* from the allegories of Chaucer and Gower in the fourteenth century, for example.

The emphasis on the niceties of courtesy extends further into the texture of the poem, for *The Floure and the Leafe* is distinguished from earlier works by what I would call its "aesthetic of ease." Certainly, the paradisaical setting, the ravishing birdsong, and so on are entirely conventional features of poems of this sort, yet the poet of *The Floure and the Leafe* takes this element much further. In the first place, the reason for the lady's sleeplessness is not any sadness or lovesickness: she specifically tells us that

. . . ther was no earthly wight,
As I suppose, had more hearts ease
Than I, for I nad sicknesse nor disease. (19–21)

Terms like "pleasaunt" and "sweet" occur with outstanding and insistent frequency in the setting of the poem (see, for example "pleasure" (113), "pleasaunt" (120), "plesant" (126), etc.). And in the overall moral scheme of the poem, there is no question of a contrast between good and evil—that between the followers of the flower and the leaf is rather (to borrow a phrase from the poem itself) one between "wele" and "better" (550). Moreover, the poet consciously subsumes any potentially disturbing elements into this esthetic of exclusive ease: hence for example, while the allusion to the medlar tree—so pointedly referred to in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* as an "open-ers"³⁸ and emblematic of debased sexuality—threatens to intrude the world of fabliau and the specter of debased sexuality into her poem, the author assures us that this is "the *fairest* medle tre / That ful of blosomes as it might be" (86–7), and again refers to it as "this *faire* tree" (93; emphases added). Likewise the goldfinch, who sits in the medlar, is associated in Chaucer's *Cook's Tale* with Perkyn Revelour³⁹ and hence empty mirth and even debauchery. Yet these overtones are likewise "neutered," as the poet tells us of how "pretile" the goldfinch leaps from bough to bough, eating "floures sweet" "passing sweetly" (89–91). In fact, so prettily is this done by the goldfinch that she tells us "By manifold / It was more pleasaunt then I devise" (96–7). The poet *need* not have introduced any potentially disturbing properties into her poem: however, she does so in

order to allow us to see her pointedly and self-consciously empty them of unpleasant associations and render them “pleasaunt.” One is then bound to ask the reason for such a strategy—for the creation of a world in which all is truly sweetness and light. The answer, on one level, must be that it was a consequence of the poet’s desire to soften the traditional all-out “war” between chastity and love and set a harmonious relationship between the two in its place. However, this softening of the moral opposition is accompanied in *The Floure and the Leafe* by a pervasive emphasis, not only on “ease,” but also on unfailing courtliness and—crucially—“richness” (see, for example, 169, 172, 215, 217), to the extent that I believe it may also have a rationale in the sociohistorical circumstances of the poem’s production.

IV

The late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries saw a widespread democratization in respect of literature. Literacy had now become more common among a newly enriched and empowered bourgeoisie. Historians tell us that, in the fifteenth century, the aristocracy, its hold on money and power now under threat, was “in crisis.”⁴⁰ It can only ever be a hypothesis, but it seems to me that this “crisis” extended to the realm of literature as well—specifically, to the writing and reception of *courtly* literature. We know that in the early fifteenth century, courtly manuscripts were being produced commercially and were to be found in London bookshops where non-courtly readers (most specifically, the gentry and merchant classes) might purchase them. To give just a single example, it is well-documented that John Shirley, a servant in the house of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, was a compiler of manuscripts which included the (courtly) works of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, amongst others. These manuscripts were lent out,⁴¹ presumably for the perusal of nonaristocratic members of the earl’s household, or perhaps even sold in bookshops.⁴²

I suggest that the particular character of much fifteenth-century courtly literature (in which allegory was the favored mode) was the response of courtly writers to the fact that their *matere*, together with their elegant and elaborate systems of signification and symbolism, were in danger of being appropriated—or, at least, accessed and understood—by those of a nonaristocratic, noncourtly class of reader. It was the desire to produce literature which would be inaccessible to all but the initiate that is so cunningly symbolized by a significant. In it, passage from *The Floure and the Leafe* the poet is describing the pleasant arbor from which she views the pageant of the flower and the leaf. Of course, dreamers or narrators, some of whom are participants in the action of the allegorical poem, some not, are a

commonplace of courtly poetry and they have a certain uniformity in that they seek out access to the place of activity (in this poetry, it is usually activity of an amatory kind) and then see and tell what they have seen.⁴³ The position of the lady here is however markedly different:

And shapen was this erber, roof and all,
 As a pretty parlour, and also
 The hegge as thicke as a castel wall,
 That who that list without to stond or go,
 Though he would all day prien to and fro,
 He should not see if there were and wight
 Within or no; but one within well might
 Perceive all tho that yeden there without
 In the field . . . (64–72)

But what is the image of a hedge so thick—as thick, significantly enough, as “a *castel* wall”—that no one can see in or gain access to it, except the initiate who is already present and who, unobserved, can observe all, if not an image of *exclusivity*? It is a potent emblem of the privileging of the initiate and deliberate exclusion of the (relatively) common reader from the allegorical pageant to follow, however much such readers may wish to appropriate the symbolisms and secret languages of the ruling class. Such a notion might seem entirely unlikely—that is, until one considers the precise nature of the courtly allegories which were being produced in these new circumstances: they were increasingly arcane and obscure. Witness, in the first instance, the opaque symbolism attached to the flower and the leaf in the poem just discussed: there is so little to choose between the companies, in the first instance, and such a harmonious reconciliation between them, in the second, that this “distinction without a difference” will seem pointless except to those versed in one of the commonplaces, at least, of scholastic philosophy. Witness too the baffling dialectic between Nature, Venus, and Flora, not to mention the ineffably fine distinction between the personifications “Fyne Portrature” and “Lusty Chere,” in Dunbar’s *Golden Targe*.⁴⁴ Witness, at its most extreme, the disembodied letters (“p”s and “b”s) which litter the landscape of Stephen Hawes’s *Pastime of Pleasure*. All may have been part of the courtly poet’s response to increased literacy and the increased availability of courtly literature. Such works were “encoded” by the courtly writers of the fifteenth century in order to baffle and resist “decoding” by all but the equally courtly reader—the fellow initiate. The “public” poetry, to use Anne Middleton’s term, of Chaucer, Gower, and Langland⁴⁵ gives way to an essentially coterie poetry, which seeks to narrow its own potential audience despite a general increase in literacy. It is a pity that the new esthetic of the late Middle Ages and the fifteenth century—one

which was clearly distinct from the Ricardian period, in the English context—has been judged decadent and has been the source of such critical abuse when in fact it was designed (in part, though not entirely) as a calculated defense against a specific set of social and historical circumstances and a perceived crisis in the courtly world inhabited by these poets.

Notes

1. *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 20.
2. *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 83.
3. "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," *English Literary History*, vol. 54, No. 4, pp. 761–799; p. 761.
4. "Dullness," p. 763.
5. Lawton does state that he "exclude[s] the "game of love" from [his] examination because it is not public poetry." ("Dullness," p. 773). However, this represents a major lacuna in the discussion and seems to me to render its conclusions inescapably partial.
6. Lois Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
7. *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
8. *From Chaucer to Spenser: An Anthology of Writings in English 1375–1575*, ed. Derek Pearsall (London: Blackwell, 1997).
9. *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). See, also, for example, *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Helen Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001); *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions: An Anthology*, ed. Julia Boffey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
10. *The Floure and the Leafe and the Assembly of Ladies*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962).
11. Pearsall, *Floure and the Leafe*, pp. 23–25.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
13. *Ibid.*
14. My argument differs significantly from Pearsall's in respect of the poet's use of color-symbolism.
15. *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. by Frances Horgan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 335.
16. Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, l. 534, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); all references to Chaucer's works are to this edition.
17. H.S. Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 101.

18. *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. F. Hopman (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 271.
19. This fact is noted in passing by Helen Phillips in *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. Helen Phillips and Nick Havely (London and New York: Longman, 1997), p. 310.
20. For a full discussion of this philosophical distinction see John F. Wippel, "Essence and Existence," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 385–410. See also F.C. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 185–187.
21. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, PtI, Qu. 2, Art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk I, chapter 13; see Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 193. Note however that this way of speaking of the distinction between essence and existence is to be found as early as Plato, *Symposium*, 211a, b.
22. Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 335.
23. *The Floure and the Leafe*, ed. Pearsall, pp. 148–149.
24. David Luscombe, *Medieval Thought*, p. 123.
25. "Chaucer's Presence and Absence, 1400–1550," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 251–269; p. 255.
26. David Luscombe, *Medieval Thought*, p. 123.
27. *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, I. Pr i.74–76.
28. Quotation and translation of Dante are taken from J.D. Sinclair, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 3 vols. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1961).
29. Cf. Chaucer, Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, Fl. 105; ll.112–114.
30. While Chaucer's knowledge of Dante in the fourteenth-century was something of an isolated case, the situation is rather different in the fifteenth century, around the years 1470–1480 (Pearsall's proposed dating of *The Floure and the Leafe*.) By now, humanists were travelling from England to Italy and we know the works of Dante were available in English (see R. Weiss, *Humanism in England During the Fifteenth Century*, 3rd edn. [Blackwell: Oxford] p. 36). We know in addition that there were late fifteenth-century translations from Boccaccio. The tale of Guiscardo and Glismonda (*Decameron*, IV.1), appear in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19: see *Early English versions of the Tales of Guiscardo and Ghismonda and Titus and Gisippus from the Decameron*, ed. H.G. Wright, EETS OS 205, published for the EETS by H. Milford (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). For a general discussion of the matter, see John Scattergood, "The Date and Composition of George Ashby's Poems," in his *Reading the Past* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 258–265. The argument for this poet's knowledge of Dante must remain hypothetical, but I have tried to make a case for her as a sophisticated and learned reader.

31. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3, a.3 in T. Gilby *et al*, *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa theologiae*, 61 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1964–1981).
32. See Frank Kermode, *Pieces of My Mind: Writings 1958–2002* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 317.
33. *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 134.
34. See Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, translated by Hugh Bredin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 86–87.
35. *Art and Beauty*, p. 87.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
37. Eco recognizes this much, by implication, when he remarks that Aquinas devised “a metaphysics of beauty which was not Platonist” and thereby “moved closer to a kind of *humanism*.” (*Art and Beauty*, p. 84; emphasis added).
38. CT I(A) 3871.
39. *Ibid.* 4367.
40. See Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Late Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 274–277. See also Felicity Riddy “Contextualising *Le Morte Darthur*: Empire and Civil War,” in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 55–73; pp. 70–73.
41. This is the view of Margaret Connolly in *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 190–195.
42. See A.S.G. Edwards, “John Shirley and the Emulation of Courtly Culture,” in *The Court and Cultural Diversity: Selected Papers from the Eighth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. E. Mullally and J. Thompson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1977), pp. 309–318. See also C. Paul Christianson, “Evidence for the Study of London’s late medieval manuscript-book Trade,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 87–108.
43. See A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
44. l. 150, in *William Dunbar: Selected Poems*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt (London and New York: Longman, 1996).
45. “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,” *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94–114.

CHAPTER 9

ROMANCING THE ROSE: THE READINGS OF CHAUCER AND CHRISTINE

Martha W. Driver

Précis: The chapter proposes that Chaucer and Christine de Pizan were “thoughtful” interpreters of the *Roman de la Rose*—the former an advocate, the latter a critic. Both worked to reinvent (“romance”) the *Rose* for a late medieval audience.

Both Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) and Christine de Pizan (1364–1429?) draw on a common stock of stories that circulated in England and on the Continent, and we know for certain that both authors were very familiar with the *Roman de la Rose*, the famous medieval work that considers love from the sacred to the profane.¹ Chaucer and Christine, both close readers of the *Rose*, are often very different interpreters, drawing on their common source to recommend or present opposed models of behavior. One recalls the advice of La Vieille, in Jean de Meun’s text, that “A woman should be careful not to stay shut up too much, for while she remains in the house, she is less seen,” which is echoed by the Wife of Bath’s delight in seeing and being seen (Wife of Bath’s *Prologue*, III(D), 551–53).² Christine, on the other hand, admonishes women in her *The Book of the Three Virtues* that “the very safest course for the profit of the soul and the honour of the body is not to be in the habit of gadding all over town.”³

While Chaucer is a translator of the *Rose* and presumably an advocate of that poem, using it as a rich resource to furnish stories and colorful details of character, Christine is a critic, commenting in her famous correspondence with Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille, that the work “would be better shrouded in flames than crowned with laurel.”⁴ Yet Christine too uses the

Rose as a model from which to draw female character, even if only as one important negative exemplar from which to develop a more positive picture of women. Rosalind Brown-Grant has said that “throughout her critique of misogyny Christine’s views on women were formed in constant engagement with Jean de Meun’s *Rose*.”⁵ I would further suggest that Christine’s views on love were shaped in large part by her reading of the *Rose*.

Christine would become well known for her active role in the love debates surrounding the *Rose*, publishing within Chaucer’s lifetime *L’Epistre au Dieu d’Amours* (later translated by Thomas Hoccleve) and subsequently *Le Dit de la Rose* and the *Epistres du débat sur le Roman de la Rose*.⁶ Chaucer’s rebuttal of the more profane points in the *Rose*, on the other hand, may be found in his *Tale of Melibee*, drawn from the translation by Renaut de Louhans of Albertanus of Brescia’s *Liber consolationis et consilii*, a work often wrongly attributed to Christine.⁷ This chapter considers some specific interpretations of the *Rose* presented by Chaucer and Christine in order to enter imaginatively into the love debates of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In telling and retelling fictions from the *Rose*, both Chaucer and Christine create new and sometimes opposed models of the feminine while reinventing the *Rose* for the late medieval audience.

Chaucer and Christine: Contexts

Chaucer and Christine were near contemporaries, Christine being some twenty years younger, and both wrote for court audiences. Both writers describe themselves as avid readers, and both speak from well-established literary traditions. They read and were influenced by many of the same authors, Ovid, Boethius, Dante, and Boccaccio among them, and they both knew personally (or knew the writings of) many of the same contemporary French writers, including Jean Froissart, Eustache Deschamps, and Oton de Granson.

Deschamps’s famous greeting to the “grant translateur, noble Geffray Chaucier,” with its playful reference to Chaucer’s translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, is “the earliest tribute of praise to Chaucer as a poet,” while in his *Chronicles*, Froissart briefly mentions Chaucer’s ambassadorial activities in France.⁸ The knight-poet Oton de Granson served in England for about twenty-eight years and “had a long friendship with Chaucer.”⁹ Christine praises de Granson in two works, complimenting him in “The God of Love’s Letter,” particularly on his chivalrous devotion to ladies: “he sought to serve ladies, to prize and to love them.”¹⁰ Christine and Deschamps also engaged in correspondence. Responding, for example, to a letter dated February 1403 from Christine, Deschamps sent a *balade* describing Christine as the “eloquent Muse” who is peerless “in [her] understanding and learning.”¹¹

There is, however, no direct evidence that Chaucer and Christine ever read each other. Christine was about thirty-six years old when Chaucer died in 1400. Inspired by the publication of Deschamps's *L'Art de Dictier* and the circulation of his *One Hundred Ballads*, Christine began her writing career sometime after 1392, and her *One Hundred Ballades* (composed before 1402) is said to have been influenced by Deschamps's earlier work.¹² In 1400, Christine was about to open the debate on the *Romance of the Rose*, the intellectual quarrel that would establish her literary reputation. As for Chaucer's influence on this particular French contemporary, one work by Christine, *Le Livre de Prudence*, has several striking similarities to Chaucer's *Melibee*, but this may be due to the influence of a common fourteenth-century source by Renaut de Louhans.¹³ Around 1336 or 1337, Renaut translated Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolacionis et consilii*, a work of moral instruction. In French, the text circulated under the title "Livre de Melibee et de Prudence," mainly at the Burgundian court. Christine seems to have read Renaut, though his specific influence on her work remains to be traced. Renaut is also the primary source for Chaucer's *Melibee*. Renaut's French translation remained popular from manuscript to print, and copies were published through the late sixteenth century.¹⁴

Though Chaucer read French, it is unclear whether Christine read English. Spurgeon cites only one example of a fifteenth-century French reader of the *Canterbury Tales*: Jean d'Orleans, Comte d'Angouleme, brother of Charles d'Orleans. "After this," comments Spurgeon, "... we find no reference to Chaucer in France, no sign of knowledge on the part of any French writer that such a poet existed" until André Thevet's account of Chaucer is published in 1584.¹⁵ In his own lifetime, Chaucer was seen in France primarily as a translator, specifically as the translator of the *Rose*, and translation (particularly in the sense of transporting one text to another, conveying multiple meanings) is the operative term in Chaucer's allusions to the *Rose* in various works. Chaucer imitates the *Rose* for purposes of comic social satire. Christine, on the other hand, uses the *Rose* for moral, didactic, and polemical purposes.

Chaucer's Imitations of the *Rose*

In the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer the narrator, kneeling by the daisy, the scene itself an homage to the *Rose*, is accused by the God of Love of heresy, of persuading people of Love's folly. His crime is twofold: he has translated the *Romaunce of the Rose* "in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose" (F 327) without pointing clearly to the moral errors in the *Rose*, thus hindering true lovers from serving Love: "That is an heresyde ayeins my lawe,/ And makest wise folk fro me

withdrawe.” (F 330–31)¹⁶ In the subsequent exchange, Queen Alceste intervenes on behalf of Chaucer the narrator, saying that he has “nat doon so greuously amys, / To translaten that olde clerkes writen,” for he has not composed the work himself, a (weak) defense that has been much discussed in recent criticism.¹⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Chaucer cannot resist poking fun at himself and has Alceste point out that he has served Love loyally in the past, though he is not a particularly good poet: “Al be hit that he kan nat wel endite, / Yet he hath maked lewed folk delyte / to serve yow . . .” (F 414–16).

Chaucer’s translation of the *Rose* has not come down to us intact. The Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose* has existed since the sixteenth century as three fragments, probably only the first of which, a translation of the Guillaume de Lorris portion of text to line 1705, is by Chaucer.¹⁸ In it, we find close translation of Guillaume’s verse. Chaucer describes Avarice, for example, as “grene as ony leek” (212), while the French text tells us that Avarice “E ausi uert come une ciue” (200).¹⁹ Chaucer’s portrait of Idleness, her hair as yellow as a copper basin and her skin as tender as that of a newly hatched chick, is again drawn directly from the French:

A mayden curteys openyde me.
 Hir heere was as yelow of hewe
 As ony basyn scoured newe.
 Her flesh tendre as is a chike. . . . (538–41)
 [Adonc m’ouri une pucele,
 Qui (mout estoit cortoise) e bele.
 Cheueus ot blons come bacins,
 La char tendre (comme uns) poucins. . . . (525–28)]

And, in describing the beautiful, welcoming Courtesy, Chaucer emphasizes her graceful (*auenaunt*) face and body, the Middle English word is taken directly from the French:

Of face and body avenaunt—
 I wot no lady so plesaunt. (1263–64)
 [Gente e bele e auenant;
 Ie ne sai fame (si) pleisant. (1240–42)]

While we do not have a translation by Chaucer of Jean de Meun, passages from Jean’s continuation of the *Rose* are the apparent source for many allusions and characterizations in the *Canterbury Tales*, perceptible even in direct comparisons between modern editions and translations of the poems. One famous borrowing from Jean, for example, is Chaucer’s description of

the Prioress's table manners in the *General Prologue*, drawn directly from the text in which La Vieille provides similar instruction in the *Rose*:

Let her guard against getting her fingers wet up to the joint in the sauce, against smearing her lips with soup, garlic, or fat meat. . . . When she has to moisten a piece in any sauce . . . she should hold the bit with her fingertips and bring it carefully up to her mouth, so that no drop of soup, sauce, or pepper falls on her breast. She must drink so neatly that she doesn't spill anything on herself. . . . She should wipe her mouth so clean that grease will not stick to the cup, and should be particularly careful about her upper lip, for, when there is grease on it, untidy drops of it will show in her wine.²⁰

The Prioress in the *General Prologue* demonstrates these same specific niceties when at table, showing her "courtesy" and her courtly manners: she does not "wette hir fynGRES in hir sauce depe" nor does she spill any morsels of food, but carefully conveys these to her mouth. She wipes her upper lip so cleanly "That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene / Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte" (I(A), 127–35). All of these are details lifted directly from Jean.

Another borrowing, of course, is much of the characterization of the Wife of Bath. As Helen Cooper has noted, "The Wife of Bath would be an impossibility in her present form without Jean de Meun."²¹ Jean de Meun, in turn, drew his character La Vieille, the Old Woman, from Book Three of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, as Thérèse Bouché has noticed.²² And, like Chaucer, Jean thinks of himself as a translator: "Jean considers himself to a considerable and quite self-conscious degree to be a translator working in the classical tradition rather than a romance poet augmenting a vernacular corpus."²³ As translators of older texts, both Chaucer and Jean function as conduits for both positive and negative ideas about women. Jean creates voices within voices—the Friend speaking as the Jealous Husband, the Old Woman advising her son—which cannot conceal, however, the antifeminist content of much of the work, as Christine will point out. Chaucer, in his translation of the French, omits or commutes the mean-spirited vulgarity of the original to create genial and often slippery social comedy. Christine, on the other hand, interacts with her exemplar, responding to it by inverting, questioning, or converting the text into practical advice for women.

Christine's *Querelle* and Subsequent Exploitation of the *Rose*

Christine established her literary reputation as a critic of the *Rose*, yet the *Rose* influenced virtually all her subsequent writings, as more than one scholar

has pointed out. For Chaucer it has been said that "The *Roman de la Rose* is a book that Chaucer read with more than usual intentness; it became part of his mentality," and the same is true of Christine.²⁴ But instead of employing straight translation, or *imitatio*, of the *Rose* text, Christine inverts the language of the *Rose* to serve her greater purpose. In her letter to Jean de Montreuil, written before September 13, 1401, Christine's opening salvo in the debate of the *Rose*, she takes exception to the words of Genius who "makes great attacks on women, saying, in fact, 'Flee, flee, flee from the deadly serpent.' Then he declares that men should pursue them unremittingly."²⁵ Then, in 1405, when Christine is completing the *Book of the City of Ladies*, she includes the passage again, upended, this time warning women against the duplicities of men: "Oh my ladies, flee, flee the foolish love they urge on you! . . . Flee, flee, my ladies, and avoid their company—under their smiles are hidden deadly and painful poisons."²⁶

As Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski has pointed out, this "is a sarcastic echo of Genius' warning against women."²⁷ While Genius warns men against women ("Fuez, fuez, fuez, fuez, fuez, enfant, fuez tel beste"), Christine exclaims, "O! mes dames, fuyes, fuyes la folle amour. . . . Fuyez la! Pour Dieu fuyez!"²⁸ Christine's passage is a parodic inversion of Jean's misogynist advice, accomplished by the simple substitution of "men" for "women" and it is also the final instruction Christine gives to women in the text. Christine, in fact, is far kinder in this instance than Jean, qualifying her reference to men in this case as those who flatter or attempt to seduce women.

In the same letter to Jean de Montreuil, Christine takes particular issue with La Vieille ("What reprehensible teachings recorded in the chapter about the Old Woman!").²⁹ Yet in her pragmatic advice to women, particularly pertaining to their self-presentation in society, Christine either echoes the advice of her source, La Vieille, or recommends the opposite. La Vieille, for example, suggests that if a woman "has a lovely neck and white chest, she should see that her dressmaker lower her neckline, so that it reveals a half foot, in front and back, of her fine white flesh."³⁰ Christine, as one might expect, recommends modest attire for women of all classes. In *The Book of the Three Virtues*, she says, "Her garments should not be too tight nor the neckline too low, nor should she take up other unchaste fashions."³¹ Where La Vieille and the Wife of Bath both advocate aggressive personal and public display, Christine thinks nice women should stay at home: "Neither should she use pilgrimages as an excuse to get away from the town in order to . . . kick up her heels in some merry company."³²

On the other hand, Christine and the Old Woman agree on other aspects of female behavior. It is not seemly for an older woman "to laugh uproariously," Christine says in *The Book of the Three Virtues*, and even younger women are not to be "disorderly in [their] games and laughter,"³³

a faint echo of La Vieille's advice to women: "When she has the impulse to laugh, she should laugh discreetly and prettily."³⁴ All three female narrators recommend sobriety, La Vielle pointing out that "when a woman gets drunk, she has no defenses at all in her, but blurts out whatever she thinks and abandons herself to anyone when she gives herself over to such bad conduct."³⁵ The same idea is echoed in the Wife's more economical lines: "In wommen vinolent is no defence—/ This knowen lecchours by experience" (III(D), 467–68). Christine attributes drunkenness to youthful behavior, advising the young woman in *The Book of the Three Virtues* "to take good care that no one should ever see her affected by having drunk too much wine. . . . So all young girls ought to be in the habit of putting generous amounts of water in their wine, and they should habitually drink very little."³⁶ This advice is apparently still appreciated, at least by my female student readers of Christine and The Wife of Bath's *Prologue*, who regularly seize upon these passages in class discussion.

There are even some points of agreement between Christine and the brutal Jealous Husband in the *Rose*. On the question of whether "beautiful apparel creates beauty in ladies and girls," the Jealous Husband comments that "All women should know that no woman will ever, as long as she lives, have anything except her natural beauty. And I say the same about goodness as I have told you about beauty."³⁷ He then compares a painted, overdressed woman to a dung-heap covered with flowers, a gross metaphor that Jonathan Swift will later exploit to similar effect in "The Lady's Dressing Room" (in which aristocratic ladies are compared with "gaudy tulips raised from dung").³⁸ Typically, Christine omits this colorful vulgarity but, like the Jealous Husband, she consistently recommends against the wearing of expensive, gaudy dress, focusing instead on the values of virtue, goodness, and inner worth. In *The Book of the Three Virtues*, Christine, like the Jealous Husband, emphasizes natural beauty. For example, women should dispense with elaborate headgear, "for there is nothing in the world lovelier on a woman's head than beautiful blond hair."³⁹ In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Reason states that "neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues."⁴⁰ Goodness of character for these several speakers may be found in virtuous actions and in a natural appearance.

In the battle of the sexes, Christine is also closer to her literary forebears, the Wife of Bath and La Vieille, than one might initially think. Yes, she does criticize the obscenity of the *Rose*. Yes, she does sneer at Jean's metaphors of love as a battle and woman as a tower to be conquered by man, both images that the Wife of Bath accepts and transmits wholesale. In the well-known passage from the *Letter of the God of Love*, Christine asks,

"if women are so flighty, fickle, changeable, susceptible, and inconstant (as some clerks would have us believe), why is it that their suitors have to resort to such trickery to have their way with them? . . . For there is no need to go to war for a castle that is already captured." And she playfully mocks the plot of the *Rose*: "What well-known and recondite knowledge [Jean de Meun] brings to bear on this, and what great adventures are involved. . . . Is a violent attack necessary then against a weak and defenseless site?"⁴¹ In this case, Christine employs gentle logic, first to contest a false analogy—martial metaphors used to describe romantic relationships between men and women—and second to suggest that perhaps such effort expended by men in the seduction of women might reflect men's own anxiety, having very little to do with the women at all.

On another (apparently) self-evident fact, however, La Vieille and Christine agree: men are untrustworthy. According to La Vieille, "all men betray and deceive women; all are sensualists, taking their pleasure anywhere."⁴² Christine likewise repeatedly discusses the deceptions of men. In *The Book of the Three Virtues*, she warns against developing friendships with men: "For women do not suspect that before these men have frequented them for very long, some or most of them will try to seduce them if they can," while in verse fifty-three of the *One Hundred Ballades* Christine advises, "Wise are those who know how to guard against false lovers who have the habit of ceaselessly betraying women with their words."⁴³ Like La Vieille, Christine does not depict men in a positive light, though Christine's advice is to remain virtuous no matter how badly men behave.

Unlike La Vieille and the Wife of Bath, who are of the diamonds-are-a-girl's-best-friend school, Christine often advises virtuous women to tolerate impossible husbands, whom they may be able to influence for good—and if not, the long-suffering wife will ultimately be rewarded in heaven. The most famous example comes at the end of the *City of Ladies*: "And those women who have husbands who are cruel, mean, and savage should strive to endure them. . . . And if they are so obstinate that their wives are unable to do anything, at least they will acquire great merit for their souls."⁴⁴ Like Griselda's patience, virtue will ultimately conquer vice, even in the worst of marriages. But not always. Christine is a surprising writer. In another poem from Christine's *One Hundred Ballades*, titled "The Jealous Husband," the adulterous female speaker asks, "What can we do with this jealous husband? / I pray to God someone can flay him! / . . . He deserves to be cuckolded, / The baboon who goes searching / His house!"⁴⁵ This voice, another of many fictions, sounds very unlike that which we have come to associate with Christine.

One of the closest conceptual echoes (or seeming echoes) by Christine of the Wife of Bath comes again in *The Letter of the God of Love* when

Christine talks about what clerks have to say about women. Christine is rebutting Jean de Meun's disclaimer, addressed to women readers of the *Rose*, about the nature of authority and "old books." Jean says:

And I pray all you worthy women, whether girls or ladies, in love or without lovers, that if you ever find set down here any words that seem critical and abusive of feminine ways, then please do not blame me nor abuse my writing, which is all for our instruction. . . . I shall never lie in anything as long as the worthy men who wrote the old books did not lie. And in my judgment they all agreed when they told about feminine ways; they were neither foolish nor drunk when they set down the customs in their books.⁴⁶

Jean alludes to the letter of St. Paul to the Romans (15:4), also a favorite citation of Chaucer: "everything is written for our instruction." Jean then explains that he must follow his sources or "old books" and claims intelligence and sobriety for their writers. Rebutting this sort of text, the Wife of Bath tells us in her *Prologue* that it is impossible for any clerk to "speke good of wyves," then poses her famous question: "Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?" She then exclaims that if women could write stories as clerks do, "They wolde han writen of men moore wikkedness / Than al the mark of Adam may redresse" (III(D), 688–96).

In *The Letter of the God of Love*, Christine says that clerks blame women for all kinds of things, and like the Wife, she imagines a world in which the tables are turned:

Of many other wrongs [women] stand accused
And blamed, in nothing can they be excused.
And that's what clerks are up to noon and night,
With verses now in Latin, now in French,
They base their words on I don't know what books
Which tell more lies than any drunkard does.
. . . If women, though, had written all those books,
I know they would read quite differently.⁴⁷

In response to Jean's claims for the honesty of clerks and their sources, the worthy men who write about the subject of "feminine ways," both female speakers suggest that clerks have fabricated their stories and that if women had written "all those books" the stories would have been quite different. Both use a similar technique, transposition, which is a type of inversion. In mathematics, transposition refers to moving a term from one side of an algebraic equation to the other, reversing its sign to maintain equality. Here equality is achieved through reversal of the gender of the author, by

transposing the woman writer or speaker and the clerk. If we look more closely at the Wife's speech and Christine's text, we see that they are strikingly similar, derived from Jean but actually closer to each other than to Jean's disclaimer.

Christine will address—and destroy—each of Jean's arguments in the opening chapter of the *Book of the City of Ladies*, as Judith Laird and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, among others, have pointed out.⁴⁸ Kevin Brownlee has suggested that Christine's "entire *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* functions as a corrective rewriting of the famous speech . . . at the structural center of the conjoined *Rose* text . . . [in which] Jean's clerkly writing [is] authorized as poetic service to the God of Love."⁴⁹ The attentive reader may further recall that Chaucer the narrator places a similar defense of himself in the mouth of Alceste in the *Legend of Good Women*; he has, according to the Queen of Love, "nat doon so greuously amys, To translaten that olde clerkes writen," though the modern feminist may note, with Maureen Quilligan, that Chaucer often engages in "an elaborate shrugging off of responsibility similar to Jean's appeal to the auctores" and that "it is important to realize that the misogyny of these disclaimers of intentional authority is ubiquitously present in the tradition Christine inherits."⁵⁰

As we have seen, Christine too makes use of "olde clerkes," including Jean de Meun, though she does not (need to) offer the same excuses. Her *Livre de Prudence*, for example, is most immediately drawn from Martin of Braga,⁵¹ though it may also have been influenced by Renaut's translation of Albertanus of Brescia, *Le Livre de Melibee et de Prudence*, with which Christine's work has often been confused. Christine's *Prudence*, like Chaucer's *Melibee*, raises the level of the discussion of love from the erotic to the universal, moving from the battle of the sexes to the practice of the Golden Rule.⁵² Both works are written in prose and contain useful advice. Both works further emphasize the cardinal virtues: justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence. And both works derive in part from their authors' readings of the *Rose*.

Jill Mann has described Chaucer's *Melibee* as "a keystone in the structure of the *Canterbury Tales*—precisely because of the importance of the role it gives to patience and to women."⁵³ Prudence, the wife of Melibeus, is the main speaker of the text. Their daughter is Sophie ("Sapience" or wisdom). *Melibee* opens with an attack on the family of Melibeus by three "olde foes" who beat Dame Prudence and wound Sophie (VII 971). Melibeus summons his counselors, who advise him to take vengeance. Prudence intervenes, but Melibeus turns on her, saying "that alle wommen been wikke, and noon good of hem alle" (1057–58) and enlarging on his antifeminist themes, which are familiar from the *Rose* and elsewhere,

for some twenty-five lines. Prudence, however, has an answer for each of her husband's accusations.

To the charge that women cannot wisely advise men, Dame Prudence responds that a man "shal nat been ashamed to lerne hem, and enquire of lasse folk than hymself" (1072). To his charge that all women are wicked, she replies that Christ would never have been born of a woman nor would he have appeared to a woman after the Resurrection if all women were indeed evil (1075). Though King Solomon might not have ever found a good woman, "ful many another man hath founden many a womman ful good and trewe" (1078). If a wife can restrain her husband's "wikked purpose, and overcometh [him] by reson and by good conseil," then his wife deserves praise rather than blame (1094). Prudence counsels Melibee to practice forgiveness and to embrace peace for the good of all: "I conseilte yow that ye accorde with youre adversaries, and that ye have pees with hem. . . . And ye knowen wel that oon of the gretteste and moost sovereyn thyng that is in this world is unytee and pees. And therfore seyde oure lord Jesu Crist to his apostles in this wise, 'Wel, happy, and blessed been they that loven and purchacen pees, for they been called the children of God'" (1675–80). This idea recurs in Christine's *Livre de Prudence*, in which Justice is defined as "that which keeps the world in peace where it reigns. . . . Oh, how justice is loved by God! And how important it is to the world! It is the bond of equity that keeps the whole polity in peace."⁵⁴

Christine's *Livre de Prudence* exists in two versions.⁵⁵ Initially titled *Prod'hommie de l'Homme* (The Book of Man's Integrity), the work was dedicated to Louis, Duke of Orleans. When Christine revised it later, retitling it *Le Livre de Prudence*, for its inclusion in her collected works, all references to the Duke of Orleans were omitted.⁵⁶ There is no modern edition. In this work, as Kate Forhan has pointed out, Christine develops the notion of prudence as "pragmatic self-interest in governance," in which everyone in a community "has obligations to the whole. Even the lowliest person is important to the peace and stability of the totality."⁵⁷ In this view of society women are active and productive participants, morally equivalent to men, an idea further developed in Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies*.

Thelma Fenster has noticed portions of Christine's *Prudence* that have made their way into the famous letter written by Christine's fictional character Sybil de Mont Hault, Dame de la Tour, a former chaperon who offers advice to a wayward aristocratic young woman. Sybil's letter appears in two works by Christine, the *Book of the Duke of True Lovers* and also in the *Book of the Three Virtues*, introduced in the latter text this way:

The letter that is contained in the Book of the Duke of True Lovers and that Sybil de la Tour sent to the Duchess . . . is reproduced in the next chapter.

Whoever wishes can pass over it, or read it, or leave it if she has seen it before, although it is good and profitable to hear and take note of for all ladies and any others who may find it useful.⁵⁸

Christine seems to speak from the page, testifying to the usefulness of Dame Sybil's letter to all women, no matter what the context is. Fenster comments: "The program outlined by Seville de Mont Hault in the *Duc des vrais amans* strongly resembles the one in *Prudence*, as it adapts for women the general lines of advice in the *Prudence*. It also removes the cultivation of a public persona from an exclusively male group by articulating a parallel public role for women."⁵⁹ *Le Livre de Prudence* has been further described as demonstrating Christine's "interesting talent for social satire," perhaps learned from her reading of the *Rose*, while marking the transition in her career from poet to social commentator.⁶⁰

In telling and retelling fictions from the *Rose*, both Chaucer and Christine are creating new, and sometimes opposed, models of the feminine while reinventing the *Rose* for the late medieval audience. Through translation, inversion, or transposition, both authors create authentic female voices that raise and address problems of identity and authority. Chaucer appropriates Jean's text to create lively social satire, creating a comic vision that generally transcends the crass ill humor of his French source, while Christine's revisions of the *Rose* may be seen superficially as the response of an historical woman writer to a popular misogynist text, or perhaps as a type of didactic art that teaches women the way to live. Both of these famous medieval authors respond to the *Rose* more subtly as well, developing complex and nuanced ideas of moral behavior from their reactions to the text. If Chaucer's *Melibee* can be said to answer antifeminist stereotypes, Christine's *Prudence* suggests the development of a sophisticated, egalitarian, and moral worldview that began with her reading of the *Rose*.

Notes

1. Modern editions of the *Rose* include *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Armand Strubel (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984; Livre de Poche, 1992); *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986); and *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
2. All quotations from Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
3. Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or the Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 152.
4. "The Debate over the *Romance of the Rose*: Christine to Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille," intro. and ed. Charity Cannon Willard, in Katharina M. Wilson,

- Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 345. Compare *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, ed. and trans. Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, 199 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1978), p. 55. See also *Le débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks, Bibliothèque du XVe Siècle 43 (Paris: Champion, 1977); Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), pp. 73–90.
5. Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 206.
 6. *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan's Epistre au Dieu d'Amours and Dit de la Rose*, Thomas Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1990), p. 160; Diane Bornstein, "Anti-Feminism in Thomas Hoccleve's Translation of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Au Dieu D'Amours*," *English Language Notes* 19.1 (September 1981): 7–13; John V. Fleming, "Hoccleve's 'Letter of Cupid' and the 'Quarrel' over the *Roman de la Rose*," *Medium Ævum* 40 (1971): 21–40; and Derek Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*, ed. D.S. Brewer (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966) pp. 201–239.
 7. See my note on this in "Chaucer, Christine, and Melibee: Morgan M 39 and Its Eighteenth-Century Owner," *The Early Book Society Newsletter* 2.2 (Spring 1997): np; and Angus Graham, "The Anonymity of Albertanus: A Case Study from the French," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 3 (2000): 198–201.
 8. Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357–1900*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 3:2, 16; Eustache Deschamps, *L'Art de Dictier*, ed. and trans. Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1974), p. 6; James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 270–271.
 9. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries*, p. 211.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
 12. *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1994), p. 27. Kate Langdon Forhan, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv.
 13. Christine's *Le Livre de Prudence* and the *Livre de la Prod'homme de l'Homme* are discussed in Willard, *Writings*, pp. xii–xiii, 249–267; Forhan, *Political Theory*, pp. 101, 105, 145, 156, 161; Christine Reno, "*Le Livre de Prudence / Prod'homme de l'Homme*: Nouvelles perspectives," in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Age: Études autour de Christine de Pizan*, ed. Bernard Ribémont and Liliane Dulac (Orléans, France: Paradigme, 1995), pp. 25–37; James Laidlaw, "Christine and the Manuscript Tradition," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*,

- ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 244; and Thelma Fenster, "Who's a Heroine? The Example of Christine de Pizan," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 119–121.
14. Graham, "The Anonymity of Albertanus," pp. 199, 200 n8, comments further: "Since the *Melibee* [*Livre de Melibee et de Prudence*] seems to have been in circulation at the Burgundian court, it may well be that Christine knew that work."
 15. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years*, vol. 3, Appendix B, "The Reputation of Chaucer in France," p. 2 n1. André Thevet, *Pourtraits et vies des Hommes illustres Grecz, Latin, et Payens*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1584), British Library 134, fol. 13, C.22, fol. 4.
 16. This suggestion is made by John Fisher in his edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), pp. 617–665. The accusation of the God of Love in *LGW* against the *Rose*—that the text is seductive and unmediated—will be echoed by Christine and Jean Gerson in the "Querelle de la Rose." Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 10–11, 35–36.
 17. See Judith Laird, "Good Women and Bonnes Dames: Virtuous Females in Chaucer and Christine de Pizan," *Chaucer Review* 30.1 (1995): 58–70; Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité de Dames* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 173–174, 176, 194.
 18. I examined Glasgow University, Hunterian MS 409 (V.3.7), *The Romaunt of the Rose*, Chaucer's translation, and the only known manuscript before the printed edition of William Thynne in 1532. Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925), pp. 295–297; James E. Blodgett, "Some Printer's Copy for William Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer," *The Library*, sixth series, 1 (1979): 97–113.
 19. *The Romaunt of the Rose and Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Ronald Sutherland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 5, 11, 26.
 20. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1971), p. 231.
 21. Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 14–15.
 22. Thérèse Bouché, "Ovide et Jean de Meun," *Le Moyen Âge* 83 (1977): 71–87.
 23. John V. Fleming, "Jean de Meun and the Ancient Poets," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 84.
 24. Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1922), pp. 80–81.
 25. Christine's Letter to Jean de Montreuil (1401), in Baird and Kane, *La Querelle de la Rose*, p. 51.

26. Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans. *The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, 1982), pp. 256–257.
27. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition,” in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 302.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
29. Baird and Kane, *La Querelle de la Rose*, p. 49.
30. Kolve and Olson, *Canterbury Tales*, p. 315.
31. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, p. 150.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
33. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, pp. 162, 150.
34. Kolve and Olson, *Canterbury Tales*, p. 316.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
36. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, p. 161.
37. Dahlberg, trans., *Romance of the Rose*, ll. 8895–8898, p. 162.
38. Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” is a favorite with students as the verses expose the lady’s corruption and decay layer by layer beneath her artificially glittering, romanticized surface. This sort of imagery may be traced to Juvenal. Steven Robinson, trans., *Sixteen Satires upon the Ancient Harlot* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet New Press, 1983), pp. 124–125, VI, ll. 457–473.
39. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, p. 135.
40. Richards, trans., *Book of the City of Ladies*, 1.9.3., p. 24.
41. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 282–283.
42. Kolve and Olson, *Canterbury Tales*, p. 315.
43. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, pp. 150–151; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Selected Writings*, p. 8.
44. Richards, trans., *Book of the City of Ladies*, p. 255.
45. Willard, *Writings*, p. 47.
46. Dahlberg, trans., *Romance of the Rose*, pp. 258–259, ll. 15195–15227.
47. Thelma Fenster, trans., “The Letter of the God of Love,” in Willard, *Writings*, pp. 146–147, 149. Both Christine and the Wife attribute clerkly misogyny to excessive desire, frustration, and impotence.
48. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Selected Writings*, pp. 302–311; Laird, “Good Women,” pp. 59–68.
49. Kevin Brownlee, “Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pizan and the *Rose*,” *Romanic Review* 79.1 (1988): 199–221.
50. Quilligan, *Allegory*, pp. 35, 40.
51. Willard, *Writings*, p. 249; Forhan, *Political Theory*, p. 122. Willard, *Writings*, includes an excerpt titled “The Book of Man’s Integrity,” pp. 261–267. Forhan, *Political Theory*, pp. 106, 146.
52. *Melibee* “had a special point in the 1380s, when government was divided into war and peace factions concerning the desirability of renewing hostilities in France”; Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1985),

- p. 287; V.J. Scattergood, "Chaucer and the French War: Sir Thopas and Melibee," in *Court and Poet*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess (Liverpool, UK: Francis Cairns, 1981), pp. 287–296. Christine's *Prudence* was likewise composed during a period of political upheaval. See Forhan, *Political Theory*, pp. 19–20, 105, 163.
53. Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), p. 95.
 54. Forhan, *Political Theory*, p. 146.
 55. It remains unclear how many manuscripts are extant of each of Christine's versions. Willard states, "there are but two known copies of this [Christine's] translation"; Willard, *Writings*, p. 251. Forhan cites three copies; Forhan, *Political Theory*, p. 145, n34: BNF fr. 605, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 11065–11073; and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 1238. Reno lists the manuscripts as Rome, Bibl. Apost. Vat. reg.lat. 1238, BNF fr. 605 and London, BL Harley 4431; Reno, "Le Livre de Prudence," in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Age*, p. 28. Laidlaw cites one manuscript as BR 11065–11073; Laidlaw, "Christine," in *Christine de Pizan*, p. 244.
 56. For other emendations made by Christine in her revision, see Reno, "Le Livre de Prudence," in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Age*, p. 28.
 57. Forhan, *Political Theory*, pp. 100, 162.
 58. Lawson, trans., *Treasure*, pp. 98–105.
 59. Fenster, "Who's a Heroine?" in *Christine de Pizan*, pp. 120–121.
 60. Willard, *Writings*, pp. xii–xiii. Charity Cannon Willard, "Christine de Pizan: From Poet to Political Commentator," in *Politics, Gender and Genre*, ed. Margaret Brabant (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 17–32.

CHAPTER 10

ENTRAPMENT OR EMPOWERMENT? WOMEN AND DISCOURSES OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Carol M. Meale

Précis: This chapter argues that some fifteenth-century texts reveal a “difficult” woman, entirely frustrated with the male-centered courtly discourse and filled with “transgressive desire”. The texts discussed include *The Floure and the Leafe*, *The Assembly of Ladies* and parts of *Malory’s Morte Darthur*.

“My hert, nor I, have don you no forfeyt,
By which ye shulde complayne in any kynde.
There hurteth you nothing but your conceyt;
Be juge your-self; for so ye shal it fynde.
Ones for always let this sinke in your mynde—
That ye desire shal never rejoyسد be!
Ye noy me sore, in wasting al this wynde;
For I have sayd y—nough, as semeth me.”

This vigorous rebuttal of the Lover’s advances by the eponymous Lady in the mid-fifteenth-century translation of *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy* is a rare instance of assertiveness in a woman’s voice concerning matters of love.¹ Of itself, this is intriguing, given the poem’s male authorship (in one of the six extant complete and partial copies, London, British Library MS Harley 372, it is attributed to “Sir Richard Ros” [fol. 61r]). But its significance is more wide-ranging than this. With regard to conventional modes of discourses of love, the Lady’s words reverberate disturbingly. They seem to indicate a simultaneous exasperation with the limits of

language (hence her recourse to abrupt colloquialism, made clear by comparison with the original French by Alain Chartier) and with the constraints of the “courtly” discourse itself, and the roles open for women to fill within it. One effect which the translator achieves is an appearance of alterity—the Lady does not conform to any stereotype—for although aloof, in the rationality of her argument throughout, she demonstrates a consistent sense of self: she cannot be dismissed solely as the object of male desire. The questions which the poem raises are therefore legion.

Chartier was writing within a well-documented tradition of the *débat d’amour* in France, and his poem sparked a mock socioliterary quarrel which in turn led to his writing an apologia in which he attempted to exonerate himself from the charge that he had defamed women by suggesting their innate cruelty.² In France, such matters were the province of aristocratic and intellectual élites, amongst whose members Christine de Pizan figured largely as a champion of the cause of women both in literature and in actuality. There is scant evidence for such a tradition in England, although some of the writings of Chaucer and his followers, including Thomas Hoccleve—who translated Christine’s *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours* in 1402, none too faithfully—offer tantalizing glimpses of what may have been a self-consciously manufactured literary *topos*, though one lacking a social *locus*.³ But there was no English Christine, and whilst the manuscript contexts of, for example, complete and extracted texts of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* and Hoccleve’s version of the *Epistre* and *La Belle Dame* suggest an interest on the part of audiences in the nature of love, the quality of production of the codices, together with what may be gathered about their ownership, point to possession by a lower social strata than the aristocracy.⁴ (Indeed, it is not until the early sixteenth century that a courtly context for the phenomenon of the “game of love,” as it has been named by John Stevens, can be established with any certainty. I would extend Stevens’s terms of reference to include performative activities, such as court masques, which again do not appear to figure in the surviving drama of the fifteenth century.)⁵

So where does this place *La Belle Dame* within English society and culture? To begin with, it is necessary to establish how the translator handled his material. As translations go, it is, generally, faithful to the original, down to the exact number of lines (with the addition of an explanatory introduction of four rhyme royal stanzas and an identical closing number of stanzas asking for pardon for any inaccuracies). Within the body of the poem the rhyme scheme adopted—ababbcbc—is the same, although the English version expands the length of the line into decasyllabic meter. Although not translated *verbatim* line by line, the overall content of each of Chartier’s stanzas is adhered to. The result, though described by many commentators

as dull and tedious in its prolixity, is, it seems to me, a highly skilful realization. What could be read as repetitiveness is, if viewed from a woman's perspective, a carefully wrought refutation of the manner and the means of men's wooing techniques. The Lady wins every point of the debate, refining throughout her notion of "worship" as applied to her *self* rather than simply to its value in the currency of the marketability of women. Influenced by Chaucer, as the poet may well have been—it is tempting to see his account of his undertaking of the translation as part of a "penaunce" imposed upon him (8–9) as a deliberate recalling of Chaucer's own fictional penance in writing the *Legend of Good Women*, albeit under a different rationale—the English *Belle Dame* works in direct counterpoint to other of Chaucer's writings, such as the *Boke of the Duchesse*, in which White's refusal of her distressed lover's suit continues until she accepts that he "ne wilned thyng but god, / And worship, and to kepe hir name / Over alle thynges, and drede hir shame."⁶ The figurative "hert-huntyng" that is the driving force behind the *Boke* (1313) is effectively critiqued by the body of the text of *La Belle Dame*.

And this brings me to the lines with which I begin this chapter. Chartier's text reads:

"Mon cuer et moy ne vous feïsmes
 Oncq rien dont plaindre vous doyez.
 Riens ne vous nuist fors vous meïsmes;
 De vous mesme juge soyez.
 Une foiz pour toutes croyez
 Que vous demourrés escondit.
 De tant redire m'ennoyez,
 Car je vous en ay assez dit." (761–8)

[“Neither my heart nor myself have ever done you anything of which you could complain. Nothing harms you but yourself; of your own self be judge. Once and for all understand that you shall remain refused. To repeat it so many times annoys me, because I have said enough to you about it.”]

There is certainly a terseness here, but the Lady retains a degree of *politesse* which is notably absent in the English. For instance, “Ones for always let this sinke in your mynde” implies a barely suppressed skepticism as to the range of the Lover's thought processes, whilst the words “Ye noy me sore” carry a personal charge, contrasted with what is rendered impersonally in the French (“To repeat it so many times annoys me”). The second half of this line—“wastyng al this wynde”—even if interpreted in the most positive sense as “wasting all this breath” (though whether the Lady here is referring to the Lover's loquaciousness or to her own enforced utterances remains a moot point) is colloquial almost to the point of rudeness. To be sure, the

subsequent brief, two stanza “Verba Auctoris” (“L’Acteur” and “Item l’Acteur” in Chartier), in which we are told that the Lover “took so gret hevinesse / That he was deed, within a day or twayne” (810–12), invites reconsideration of the preceding 800 lines, and the problem is not resolved in the Envoy, where, in the first stanza, the poet implores “trew lovers” to “flee” “Such avantours” (813–4), the latter a direct translation of Chartier’s “vanteurs,” (786) the latter a perjorative term familiar from Christine de Pizan’s dissection of courtly deceit.⁷ But who exactly *is* the villain [*sic*] in the two versions of *La Belle Dame*? In apparent contradiction to the explicit warning against the dangers of duplicity enunciated here, in the second stanza of the Envoy the translator pleads with “ladyes, or what estate ye be” “For goddes love, do no such cruelte” (821, 823). The ambivalence of the authorial stance in both texts is puzzling, and one which can probably be deciphered only by reference to the cultural specifics surrounding Chartier’s original composition.⁸ This cannot fully explain the English version, though, since the social register is lowered by the address to women of all classes, as opposed to the “dames et demoiselles” (793) specified in the French. There is no direct cultural transposition, the English text floating free from any socioliterary grounding. Be this as it may, the English translator can be credited with the presentation of feminine selfhood which steps beyond the boundaries of the courtly, and it is this which defines the parameters of this chapter: the beginning of the search for other examples of female subjectivity.

The scope for investigation along these lines would seem, potentially, to be immense. Yet it is, to a great extent, self-limiting. Whilst many male authors can, and do, create strong women—amongst them the heroines of the late romances of *Partonope of Blois*, Metham’s *Amoryus and Cleopas* and *Sir Degrevaunt*, all of which texts offer possibilities for feminist critique⁹—these women are active, but only in so far as their activity is congruent with male desire, brought to a satisfactory conclusion in the rite of marriage. There remains a prevalent bias of the representation of women as objects, in equal measure, of fascination and horror, a combination which surfaces only too often and in abundance in antifeminist sentiment. The expression of women’s desire is essentially transgressive, at least amongst English speakers in Britain: it took a fifteenth-century Welsh woman, Gwerful Mechain, to celebrate female genitalia, in a neat reversal of the masculine predilection for scopophilia—the process by which the female body is deconstructed into its constituent parts under the masculine gaze.¹⁰ The fact that it was a woman writer who broke this taboo opens one obvious avenue for exploration: that of the female literary canon. Recent attempts to broaden this canon have not met with universal encouragement or approval; as Alexandra Barratt has famously remarked, the onus still lies

upon scholars to provide proof of female authorship where anonymity is concerned: the paradigm remains one of masculinity.¹¹ Even with this caveat, there has been a sufficient amount of convincing scholarship to suggest that women were capable of writing in a variety of genres: dream-poetry and allegory—*The Assembly of Ladies* and *The Floure and the Leaf*; lyric poetry—notably in Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6, the so-called Findern manuscript, in relation to which Sarah McNamer has argued persuasively that a total of fifteen short poems were written by women;¹² and, of course, religious testimonies. The latter category may seem an unlikely one in which to find any delineation of female desire, but amongst English female writers on religion—markedly, Margery Kempe—human physicality, and in the case of the latter, sexuality, is used metaphorically to convey spiritual transcendence.

Margery's account of Christ as her lover, for instance, carries medieval exegesis of *The Song of Songs* to its logical conclusion,¹³ but, although she employs the language of physical love to explain the ravishing of her soul, it is in more incidental asides that her literal as opposed to figurative desire is made evident. She may protest in her opening chapters about her husband's insistence on a sexual relationship, but in Book I chapter 76 she reveals that "in hir yong age [she] had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinat louys to hys persone," and she resignedly takes as punishment for this earthly delight the physical and spiritual miseries of looking after John Kempe in his "childisch" and incontinent old age (180–1). The desires of her young flesh are equally vividly recalled in the temptation to commit adultery and in her tormenting visions of male genitalia recounted in Book I chapters 4 and 59 (14–15, 145). Marriage, for a woman of Margery's burgher class, was clearly not necessarily a form of entrapment, even though she believed herself to have married below her status (I.2.9): it is only once she has begun her spiritual quest that she wishes to untie the bonds with the same abandon that she discards her worldly pride and her fine clothes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is more difficult to find instances of sexual instinct voiced by women away from texts designed, if not made available, for public consumption, in the more private arena of the household and family. Margaret Paston, though, in an early letter to her husband, John I, hints wryly at marital intimacy when she wrote, probably in December 1441:

I pre yow that ye wyl were the ryng wyth the emage of Seynt Margrete that I sent yow for a rememrav[n]se tyl ye come hom. Ye haue lefte me sweche a rememrav[n]se that makyth me to thynke vppe-on yow bothe day and nyth wanne I wold slepe.¹⁴

If Norman Davis's dating of the letter is correct, she is referring to her first pregnancy: John II was born in 1442. During a later pregnancy, possibly with her daughter, Anne, the subscription to another letter reads "youre gronyng wyff, M.P." (I:255 [no. 151]). Amongst the many surviving letters written by urban and gentry women to their husbands, these are, to my knowledge, the closest any come to an open admission of the marital relationship, replete though most are with messages of longing for the safe and speedy return home of their men. Decorum was clearly exercised where female sexuality and experience was concerned, and this not solely in the realm of the written word: Michael Camille's work on the visual arts connected with medieval love presents a striking parallel in its demonstration of the rarity of the depiction of women in paintings or on artifacts, such as marriage caskets, erotically objectifying men.¹⁵

If open sexuality was a subject infrequently aired by women, what of love in its more encompassing manifestations? Turning to the allegory of *The Floure and the Leafe*, dated by Derek Pearsall to between 1460 and 1480,¹⁶ the author delineates with delicacy the company of Flora, the knights and ladies in green, who "loved idlenes" (536) as inherently unstable: "Ne they last not but for a season" (562). It is a description strikingly reminiscent of Sir Thomas Malory's comparison of love in the days of Arthur and in his own lifetime: "Wherefore I lykken love nowadayes unto sommer and wynter: for, lyke as the tone ys colde and the othir ys hote, so faryth love nowadays."¹⁷ The recognition of this instability is therefore not a specifically gendered perception. What is remarkable about the poem, however, apart from the skilful manipulation of the poetic form,¹⁸ is its generous even-handedness. The modesty of the narrator, who we do not learn is a woman until line 462 of its 595 line total, is such that she gazes upon the companies of the green and the white in an entirely nonjudgmental way, humbly enquiring and accepting of the interpretation of the sight before her offered by the female figure of authority to whom she talks. She has no axe to grind in matters of love: "but why that I ne might / Rest, I ne wist, for there nas earthly wight, / As I suppose, had more hearts ease / Then I, for I nad sicknesse nor disease" (18–21). This stance, of an untroubled mind, contrasts strongly with poems of a comparable nature written by men (even the Narrator of the nondream vision *La Belle Dame* is in misery because of the death of his mistress), in which they seek consolation for their own lovelorn state of confusion through the medium of the dream device. And a dream vision, of course, *The Floure and the Leafe* is most definitely not. Dreams work on the varying levels and manifestations of psychological disturbance, whether fully processed or not, and, contrary to the complaisance expressed by Dame Pertelote (and, *pace*, Freud), they rarely offer readily decipherable solutions to the preoccupations of the one who experiences

them. *The Floure and the Leafe*, in the distance from the tradition which the author deliberately invokes, offers what is possibly the most dispassionate view of matters of the heart to survive from the Middle Ages. The moral stance as voiced by the expositor may appear rigorous, but this rigor does not prevent the followers of the Leaf from compassionately, with *pit  *, aiding their fellows, in helping them to dry out their clothes, concoct ointments to heal the sick and "Pleasaunt salades" for them to eat, after they have suffered the vagaries of the allegorical "storm and heat" of love (404–13). Further, in the lady's approving acceptance of the Narrator's choice to follow those who owed allegiance to the values of the Leaf, there is a startling allusion to the figure of Male Bouch, or slander, in her prayer that the Narrator should be spared his attentions (578–80), which recalls not only the seminal satire of the *Roman de la Rose*, but also the repeated injunctions of Christine de Pizan to her fellows to avoid the dangers which his followers pose.¹⁹ Here female subjectivity is admirable: balanced, assured, and aware.

The Assembly of Ladies, of a similar date, is a poem of a different order. It has been criticized on many grounds for its supposed literary shortcomings. Alexandra Barratt, for instance, whilst arguing for its female authorship, concludes that it offers a "glimpse . . . of the dark side of women's consciousness," presenting "a picture of female helplessness, dependence on others, particularly on men" (the female Narrator relies on her anonymous male interlocutor to give her text a name [748–53]), and "a Narrator whose only power lies in deliberate uncooperativeness, who refuses to communicate verbally, or does so only with reluctance."²⁰ Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson, on the other hand, view the poems's confusions—both in a literary sense, in the seemingly motiveless narrative movement, and symbolically, in the figure of the maze in which women find themselves lost and frustrated, to the extent that they overstep the railings "For verray wroth" (41–2)—as feminine dissatisfaction with contemporary social mores.²¹ This seems to me to be a valuable reinterpretation, although I have elsewhere suggested a reading of the text whereby a female author is attempting to negotiate a tradition of written discourses on love, discourses which both define and reinforce notions of "courtly" and "desire" as essentially masculine constructs. In this way the poem acts out a commentary on the lack of available female models of writing as much as it does the exasperation with modes of behavior formulated by, and for, men.²² Derek Pearsall's comment that there is a "general indifference to tradition observable in the poem as a whole" thus takes on new meaning.²³

It is no coincidence that in terms of versification and coherence, the complaints against men which largely comprise the section of the poem which is set at the court of Lady Loyalty demonstrate a technical mastery

not always otherwise evident, for in the *corpus* of Middle English women's secular writing, it is in the numerous short poems commonly called lyrics, in which the female speakers are not generally anything other than discomposed, that composure and assurance of tone are most readily found. True, there can be monotony in reading these in modern critical editions, the themes being familiar ones of complaint or betrayal, or longing for the absent beloved, but poems of this type were not generally disseminated textually in such a concentrated fashion during the medieval period. They are generally found scattered apparently indiscriminately, often as fillers, within larger collections of poetry and/or prose, only more rarely occurring together in the same codex. Read at face value, however, I am reminded, in the passivity of the female voices, of John Donne's simile of the souls of two lovers being "twin compasses" in "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning": the man may roam, but the woman "leans, and hearkens after" him.²⁴ And such roaming, or at least time spent away from home either on military service or on the more prosaic pursuit of business interest, was a reality with which medieval women lived.²⁵ There was undoubtedly a positive aspect for women within this social norm, in that they were able to attain a degree of autonomy and independence in running estates and households, but this lies outside my interests in this chapter. What is of concern, though, is how, if viewed through the filter of this everyday occurrence, apparently conventional lyrics can be turned into a validation of marital experience. Sarah McNamer's analysis of the Findern lyrics is particularly compelling in this respect, as she carefully reconstructs the gentry milieu in which CUL MS Ff.1.6 is agreed to have originated, repositioning many of the lyrics alongside prolonged absences and the marital vows undertaken by women in the Sarum rite.²⁶ They thus take on a new dimension of subjectivity. This analysis has, of course, the benefit of Findern being one of the few codices which can, with any degree of certainty, be termed a woman's book, due to the large number of female names inscribed within it.²⁷ There is greater difficulty in assigning poems such as that beginning "Grevus ys my sorowe / Both evyne and moro," given the editorial title "Love Longing" by Rossell Hope Robbins and "Unkindness Hath Killed Her" by Alexandra Barratt, to female authorship.²⁸ The problem here is contextual. It survives uniquely in London, British Library MS Sloane 1584, a miscellany of English and Latin which was compiled and owned by John Gysborn, canon of the Premonstratensian house of Coverham in Yorkshire in the late fifteenth century. Whilst Gysborn preserved some other unlikely materials, these included a lyric, or song, which begins "Off seruyng men I wyll begyne, / Troly, loley," entitled by Robbins "A Young Girl's Ideal."²⁹ Whilst chance preservation of female-authored lyrics alongside those ventriloquized satirically by a female

persona cannot be ruled out, this particular juxtaposition is an unpromising fact upon which to project any theory of female subjectivity.

The contrast between these two manuscripts does, though, highlight an important point to be made about the majority of the secular works which I have so far mentioned. This is to do with collocation of texts, and modes of reading. I have discussed Findern and women's reading tastes before, in an examination of manuscript contexts of the *Legend of Good Women*, where I found the conjunction of Chaucer's *pyramus & tesbe* with Hoccleve's *Lepistre de Cupide* to be significant in relation to the poems' intertextuality: it is one example of the manuscripts which I referred to earlier as providing evidence of an audience for debating the merits and demerits of love.³⁰ In later quires of the same codex (I–L) appears *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*, followed in this and the subsequent two quires by a series of love lyrics, including five attributed by McNamer to women. The juxtaposition is suggestive: what *La Belle Dame* is rejecting—courtly discourse—is judged alongside the discourse of marital, or at least devoted, love. In another manuscript, Trinity College Cambridge MS R.3.19, *La Belle Dame* is situated in Booklet 7, where it is followed by the short poem “The .X. Commaundmentes of Love,” and the unique .IX. *ladyes Worthy*. Although we cannot be certain that the manuscript's ordering of quires is original, it seems hardly coincidental that the preceding booklet contains *The Assembly of Ladies* as its sole item; and that following, the *Legend of Good Women*. *La Belle Dame* and the *Assembly* are both present in one other manuscript: Longleat MS 258, datable to c.1500. According to a list of the original contents of this volume a (now missing) quire contained a copy of *The Floure and the Leafe* (the only surviving copy is in Speght's 1598 edition of the collected works of Chaucer). A further copy of *La Belle Dame* is in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16, owned by, and probably made for, John Stanley of Hooton in the Wirral, whose career at the court of Henry VI included fifteen years as Usher of the Chamber. In this codex it is separated from Hoccleve's *Epistre* by the short “*Ragman's Roll*,” described by John Norton-Smith as “A Ladies' game,” that is, a social diversion,³¹ and succeeded by Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* and *The Legend*. A contemporary table of contents confirms that this was the intended ordering. All the surviving evidence suggests that this latter codex, of all the books mentioned here, circulated amongst the highest echelons of society.

What these manuscripts can tell us is all we can know about textual reception. The techniques of literary criticism and the application of cultural theory may help to fill in the lacunae, but every reading is a social construct, historically and culturally determined. Nevertheless, the works discussed are distinctive in their assertion of female subjectivity and this, as *La Belle Dame* evidences, is not solely the by-product of the sex of the

author. I should like to conclude this chapter by looking at two other representations of late medieval women by a male writer whom I have already mentioned: Sir Thomas Malory.

It is a literary and critical truism to state that Malory, as he approaches the end of his historical compendium of the Arthurian world, increasingly finds his own voice: his reworking of his sources becomes freer, his dialogue assumes a greater degree of naturalism, and his authorial interventions punctuate the text. It is Malory's engagement with the figures of Elaine, the Maid of Astolat, and Gwenyver which signals most clearly a concern with the interior worlds of women, and the choices open to them. Neither is active in any traditional sense: in Malory's sources, the French *La Mort le Roi Artu* and the Middle English stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, they each represent different aspects of the inevitable downfall of Launcelot and, through him, the kingdom of Arthur.³² With reference to what has often been termed the homosocial chivalric code, Gwenyver in particular plays out her role in the drama as little more than a cipher.³³ She is the means by which Launcelot is bound to Arthur, and through whom the honor and reputation of the court is maintained. Once the highly tensioned triangle is broken, the descent of the kingdom into internecine conflict cannot be prevented. Malory, however, is not content with this view of the matter. It is only in his version of the romance that Gwenyver's recognition of moral responsibility and culpability (as she sees it) is expanded to encompass the subjectively realized agonies of self-denial and renunciation of desire.

In the French, Guinevere retreats to the holy life to prevent what she sees as retribution, whatever the outcome of the final battle between Arthur and Mordred: whoever is victor, she says, she will be killed. She flees to a nearby nunnery, motivated not by religious belief or penitence, but by simple fear for her life.³⁴ In the stanzaic English version, there are hints of a self-consciousness which Malory was to develop. The queen, once discovered by Launcelot at Amesbury, faints "Thryse" (3626) before making confession to the Abbess of their joint role in "All thys sorowfull werre" (3641). She refuses a last kiss from him but her death is reported as an incidental in the tying up of loose ends, after the death of Lancelot and the subsequent eremitic conversion of Ector (3714–21, 3954–9). For Malory, on the other hand, this scenario presents an opportunity to make further forays into her interiority.

The adjectives which have been used to describe Malory's Gwenyver are remarkably consistent: petulant, jealous, and capricious are all labels which have been used. This is to underestimate the constraints imposed upon her both by her gender and her social standing, constraints which Malory clearly perceives. Her role is to remain at Westminster or Camelot, wherever Arthur chooses to base his court, and await the homecoming

knights from whatever adventures they may have been on in proving their chivalric worth. She has no movement, and in this respect she is not unlike the women in lyric poetry whose emotional existence is defined by the presence or absence of the men they love. All the negative connotations of the terms quoted above may be turned upside-down if we look through her eyes, those of an insecure woman constantly tortured by self-doubt and confusion over her lover's feelings. As queen, she does not have even the autonomy of women of gentle status. She does not manage the household or rule the country as regent, since her husband is neither incapacitated nor imprisoned in, say, the way in which Henry VI was. But when given the chance, she takes it. Her defense of the Tower of London against Mordred's attack is an insight into her potential forcefulness, which aligns itself with a similar engagement with war undertaken by Margaret of Anjou, consort of Henry VI, a time through which Malory lived and fought.³⁵ Where Gwenyver comes into her own in the exercise of choice is in her decision to seek spiritual salvation, and the pain with which she turns Launcelot away is distilled in the lines "for as well as I have loved the heretofore, myne harte woll nat serve now to se the; for thorow the and me ys the floure of kyngis and knyghtes destroyed."³⁶ Malory grants her final validation in her death, "but halfe an oure afore" Launcelot, now a hermit, reaches Amesbury, as he has had revealed to him in a dream that he should do, to collect her body for burial beside her husband.³⁷ It is in this context that Malory's curious observation earlier in his history comes to mind. His encouragement to "all ye that be lovers" that they should "calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver, for whom I make here a lytyll mencion, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therfor she had a good ende"³⁸ has occasioned puzzlement, but it reveals an awareness of Gwenyver's interior truth, shaped in no small part by the pressures of a gender-biased society.

The queen, in her decision to forsake secular life for holy chastity, follows in the steps of many noble and gentry women in fifteenth-century England.³⁹ The Maid of Astolat, meanwhile, chooses virginity and a secular martyrdom. Malory does not condemn her for her low social class, as does the French *Mort*:⁴⁰ rather, she is shown having practical housewifely skills which enable her to nurse Launcelot whilst he is recovering from his wound at her father's residence. Whilst she is being groomed for marriage she, as much as Gwenyver, is constrained by social expectation. Her brother is free to follow Launcelot; she is not. Her naïveté, in offering to take Gawain to her room to show him the shield of the anonymous knight who is in refuge with her family, and her father's hasty embargo on such a move, suggest an innocence and integrity which is borne out by her later actions. When Launcelot has departed, the Maid finds herself unable to

sleep, eat or drink. At the end of ten days she is shriven, by her own choice: "she shrove her clene and resseyved hir Creature," but she cannot forget or forego her love. At the priest's injunction to "leve such thoughtes" she protests:

"Why sholde I leve such thoughtes? Am I nat an erthely woman? And all the whyle the brethe ys in my body I may complayne me, for my belyve ys that I do none offence, though I love an erthely man, unto God, for He fourmed me thereto, and all maner of good love comyth of God. And othir than good love loved I never sir Launcelot du Lake . . . And sitthyn hit ys the suffer-aunce of God that I shall dye for so noble a knyght, I beseche The, Hyghe Fadir of Hevyn, have mercy uppon me and my soule, and uppon myne unnumerable paynes that I suffir may be alygeaunce of parte of my synnes. For, swete Lorde Jesu," seyde the fayre maydyn, "I take God to recorde I was never to The grete offender nother ayenste Thy lawis but that I loved thys noble knyght, sir Launcelot, oute of mesure. And of myselff, Good Lorde, I had no myght to withstonde the fervent love, wherefore I have my deth!"⁴¹

Her request, in the letter which accompanies her body down the river to Westminster, for her "masse-peny" to be paid for her is again indicative of her innate piety, and Malory, in choosing to recount the manner of her death and the reception of her body at court in the way he did—unlike in either source, her death is given a dignity which removes it from the level of a simple plot devised demonstrating further the corruption of the values of the court—validates the notion that love originating in the secular world is as worthy of commendation as that which derives its impetus from contemplation of the spiritual. As such, her story becomes the secular equivalent of the romance of hagiography, one which may be read alongside accounts of the virgin martyrs, such as Saints Catherine and Margaret, who refuse either to forsake or compromise their faith by choosing marriage to anyone less than their chosen bridegroom, Christ.⁴²

To draw this analogy is not to argue that Malory is consciously emulating the well-established tradition of structural narrative parallels between hagiography and popular romance in post-conquest England, as usefully reformulated by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne.⁴³ Indeed, if this model exists in Malory's text, it may more accurately be applied to an analysis of the story of Galahad (derived, of course, from a thirteenth-century French Cistercian source), in which, through gender-reversal, Galahad becomes the beloved of Christ who fights the lures of the world to succeed in his quest for the transcendent union with the Divine, the only knight to whom the Grail is fully revealed. Elaine of Astolat's story, in contrast, belongs irreparably to the world. In terms of narrative structure there is a transgressive reordering of signification: Launcelot is substituted for Christ,

the priest for the pagan tempter. There will be no mystical union for Elaine, only the hope of spiritual redemption. This interpretation is unique to Malory and is key to understanding what amounts to a legitimization of female desire, for which I can think of no equivalent within contemporary secular writing, even in letters by women.⁴⁴ Margery Paston's passion for her family's steward, Richard Calle, for instance, and her undoubtedly spirited resistance to the Bishop of Norwich's attempt on behalf of her family to have her marriage annulled, is played out in the words of her outraged relatives rather than in her own; and whilst her sister-in-law, Margery Brews, is justly renowned for the poem which she sent to her "right welbelouyd Voluntyn" John Paston, the expression of her longing for him is enclosed, textually, within references to the exacting monetary negotiations which dictated whether or not their marriage would proceed. Her missive may well be described as demonstrating the anxiety of desire.⁴⁵

Recent feminist scholarship has been much occupied with exploring, if not privileging, the notion of virginity as a positive choice of being which was available to women, of avoiding, or transcending, the entrapment of both love and marriage.⁴⁶ But this life too, if no true vocation was felt, involved renunciation and denial of aspects of the self, as witnessed by Aelred of Rievaulx's letter recounting the admonitory story of the nun of Watton, her lack of vocation, resulting pregnancy, and the miraculous intervention of the Virgin, and as witnessed by the scandals reported in episcopal visitations of nunneries.⁴⁷ Reviewing the materials discussed here it seems to me that the discourses concerning love and marriage which they contain offer a range of experiences and choices for women. Entrapment can be as much a state of mind or temperament as a reflection of social circumstance, and empowerment can lie in the choice to break out from the conventional masculinist discourse as much as in the realignment of this discourse to satisfy feminine desire, the latter being most clearly demonstrated in *The Floure and the Leafe*. It remains to be seen exactly how far these perceptions are borne out in the records and biographies of the lives of actual women.

Notes

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr Leslie Ford Thomas.

1. *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*, in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 7 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1894–1897), 7, *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp. 299–326, ll.789–796.
2. Alain Chartier, *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. J.C. Laidlaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 328–370.

3. See *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen, and Cologne: Brill, 1990). On Christine's participation see David F. Hult, "The *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan, and the *querelle des femmes*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 184–194.
4. See below p 171 and n.31.
5. John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 154–202; Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1984).
6. *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For *Legend*, see G 469; and for the *Boke*, ll.1262–1264 (see ll.1015–1018).
7. See, e.g., Christine de Pizan, *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, in *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*, ed. Fenster and Erler, pp. 34–42, ll.28–67, and the use of the verb "se vanter."
8. See Richard Firth Green, "The *Familia Regis* and the *Familia Cupidinis*," in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 87–108 [99–101].
9. See Helen Cooper's essay in this volume. Sarah McNamer tentatively suggests the possibility of female authorship of *Sir Degrevaunt* in "Lyrics and Romances," in the *Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace, pp. 195–209 [206–207].
10. Gwerful Mechain, "Cywydd y cedor" [The female genitals], in *Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry*, ed. D. Johnston (Cardiff: Tafol, 1991), pp. 41–43, trans. Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 71–72. For Gwerful's life and career see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "Women and their Poetry in Medieval Wales," in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 183–201 [185–186, 190–198].
11. Alexandra A.T. Barratt, "'The Flower and the Leaf' and 'The Assembly of Ladies': Is There a (Sexual) Difference?" *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987): 1–24 [1–2].
12. Sarah McNamer, "Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript," *Viator* 22 (1991): 289–310.
13. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940), Bk I, chapter 36, p. 90: "therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle & kysen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt . . ."
14. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976), 1:217 [no. 125].
15. Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Laurence King, 1998), pp. 34–39.

16. *The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies*, ed. D.A. Pearsall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 20.
17. Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, rev. P.J.C. Field, 3rd edn., 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3:1120.
18. *The Floure and the Leafe*, ed. Pearsall, pp. 63–64.
19. See n.7 above; also *Christine de Pisan: The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 98–105.
20. Barratt, “‘Flower and the Leaf’ and ‘Assembly of Ladies,’” p. 21.
21. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson, “The *Assembly of Ladies*: A Maze of Feminist Sign-Reading?” in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Sellers (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 171–196.
22. Carol M. Meale, “Women’s Voices and Roles,” in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).
23. *The Floure and the Leafe*, ed. Pearsall, p. 68.
24. *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 84–85, ll.26, 31.
25. Rowena E. Archer, “‘How ladies . . . who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates’: Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c.1200–1500*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Stroud: Sutton), pp. 149–181.
26. McNamer, “Female Authors, Provincial Setting,” pp. 297–298.
27. See the facsimile, *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6*, intro. Richard Beadle and A.E.B. Owen (London: Scholar Press, 1978).
28. *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 214–218 [no. 206]; *Women’s Writing in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barratt (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 283–287.
29. *Secular Lyrics*, ed. Robbins, pp. 32–33 [no. 35].
30. For this paragraph see Carol M. Meale, “The Tale and the Book: Readings of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Chaucer in Perspective: Middle English Essays in Honour of Norman Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 118–138.
31. *Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16*, intro. J. Norton-Smith (London: Scholar Press, 1979), p. xxiv.
32. *La Mort le Roi Artu*, ed. Jean Frappier (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964); *Le Morte Arthur*, ed. P.F. Hissiger (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975).
33. The view of Malory’s work as valuing homosocial bonds above heterosexual remains surprisingly dominant: see McNamer, “Lyrics and Romances,” in the *Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace, p. 206.
34. *La Mort le Roi Artu*, ed. Frappier, chapters 169–170, pp. 216–219, which includes the lines: “En tel maniere demora la reïne leanz avec les nonnains et s’i mist por la poor qu’ele avoit del roi Artu et de Mordret” [In such manner

- the queen stayed there with the nuns because of the fear which she had of King Arthur and Mordred].
35. See Helen E. Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), chapters 9–13.
 36. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Vinaver, rev. Field, 3:1252.
 37. *Malory*, ed. Vinaver, rev. Field, 3:1255.
 38. *Ibid.*, 3:1120.
 39. See, e.g., Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture: Virginité and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 5.
 40. Here Gawain says to Arthur as they gaze at Elaine's body: "et vos deïsts voir qu'il ne daingeroit pas son cuer abessier por amer en si bas leu" [and you were right to perceive that he would not condescend to debase his heart to love someone so low-born], *La Mort le Roi Artu*, ed. Frappier, chapter 71, p. 90.
 41. *Malory*, ed. Vinaver, rev. Field, 2:1092–1094.
 42. See *Saint Katherine of Alexandria: The Late Middle English Prose Legend in Southwell Minster MS 7*, ed. Saara Nevanlinna and Irma Taavitsainen (Cambridge and Helsinki: Brewer and Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1993), 3–48; Katherine J. Lewis, "'Lete me suffice': Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain, Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale and Lesley Johnson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 69–82.
 43. Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 92–106.
 44. This is in strong contrast to earlier sections, such as that of "Launcelot du Lake," in which Malory is more heavily reliant on his sources.
 45. *Paston Letters and Papers*, ed. Davis, 1:341–344, 409, 541 [nos. 203, 245, 332]; 662–663 [no. 415].
 46. For example, Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*; Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginité in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), chapter 4; Ruth Evans, "Virginités," in the *Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace, pp. 21–39 [31–6].
 47. Salih, *Versions of Virginité*, pp. 152–165; Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c.1275–1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), chapter 11.

CHAPTER 11

WRITING ABOUT LOVE IN LATE MEDIEVAL SCOTLAND

Priscilla Bawcutt

Précis: This chapter surveys love poetry in medieval Scotland, examining a number of genres, such as lyric, historical romance, dream vision, and allegory. It indicates the traditions—especially that of fin amor—that influenced these writings, and the variety of tone that they display.

Few critics have paid much attention to Scottish medieval love poetry. In *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature*, published as long ago as 1934, Janet M. Smith voiced what probably still remains the common opinion. She remarked that “the ideal of courtly love . . . never took root in Scotland,” and continued, “Apart from the *King’s Quair* we have remarkably little medieval love poetry.”¹ In recent years there has been growing recognition of the richness of Scottish poetry in the fifteenth century, yet little of the abundant scholarship devoted to its study and analysis has focused on love poetry—the only exceptions being the attention paid to two undoubted masterpieces, *The Kingis Quair* of James I and Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid*. It is true that only a small body of Scottish love lyrics is now extant, but there were many other modes of writing about love in the late Middle Ages. The purpose of this chapter is largely descriptive: to indicate the nature of the surviving material, most of which dates from the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century. It is designed also to illustrate the variety of tone in these writings, the influence upon Scottish authors of traditions emanating both from France and England, and, most strikingly, the powerful impact of Chaucer and the so-called Chaucerian poets. Its arrangement is generic: I shall look, in turn, at lyrics; two specimens of historical romance; dream visions and courtly allegory; and, lastly, writings that are explicitly moral or didactic. Such a

brief essay must necessarily be selective, not exhaustive; it aims to call attention to interesting, and sometimes neglected, poems.

Despite the paucity of surviving texts, there are many references in the records of the burghs and the royal court which suggest that Scotland had a rich tradition of song. One would dearly like to know the contents of the "sang buke" that was presented to King James IV in 1489, and the theme of the "ballat" sung to him on the morning of January 2, 1491.² Some evidence exists that relates specifically to love lyrics, although, unfortunately, it is for the most part scattered and late in date. Particularly valuable testimony is provided by *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c. 1550); the sixth chapter of this work is a pastoral interlude, describing how Scottish shepherds and their wives entertain themselves with tales, dances, and "melodius sangis."³ Although many of these resist identification, the titles of some can be related to known love poems, and also to their spiritual parodies in *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (first printed in 1565). Another witness is the humorous poem called *Colkelbie Sow*, probably composed toward the end of the fifteenth century.⁴ This contains tantalizing allusions to lyrics and dance songs. One of these is entitled "Joly lemmane" (366) and may perhaps be the same as a piece mentioned later: "Joly lemmane [*lover*], dawis [*dawns*] it nocht day" (373). The words suggest that the theme is an *aubade*, or dawn-song; another possibly treating a similar theme is "Cok craw [*crow*] thow quhill day" (370). None of these, however, has been identified. Another title mentioned in this work is "My deir derling" (423); this possibly alludes to the English carol, "My darlyng dere, my daysye flowre," which is attributed to Skelton in an early print.⁵

The testimony of the poet Gavin Douglas, writing in the first decade of the sixteenth century, is particularly interesting. The Prologue to book 12 of his *Eneados*, a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, celebrates the month of May and is largely devoted to describing the natural beauties of that season. But it contains a short passage which scrutinizes the erotic behavior of young people in May almost as attentively as the singing of birds and the blossoming of flowers. Love manifests itself particularly in song and dance:

Sum sang ryng sangis, dansys ledys, and rovnadis, *lead*
 With vocis schill, quhill all the dail resovndis; *shrill / till / dale*
 Quharso thai walk into thair caralyng, *wherever*
 For amorus lays doith the rochys ryng. ⁶ (193-6) *rocks*

Douglas records what purport to be snatches of songs sung by two of the girls:

Ane sang, "The schyp salys our the salt faym, *over / foam*
 Will bryng thir merchandis and my lemman haym;" *home*
 Sum other syngis, "I wilbe blyth and lycht, *joyful*
 Myne hart is lent upon sa gudly wight." (197-200) *bestowed / fine / man*

Douglas writes more critically, a little later, of young men whose minds are largely set on "bawdry" (210): they compose "ballettis" in honor of their mistresses but then plot how to seduce them.

Only one substantial collection of early Scottish love lyrics survives. This is the fourth section of the Bannatyne Manuscript, entitled "ballattis of lufe," which runs to eighty-three folios and contains over a hundred items.⁷ But the Bannatyne Manuscript was not completed until 1568, and several of the love poems, such as those composed by Alexander Scott, are not medieval. Many others, unfortunately, are almost impossible to date. Nonetheless this section contains much verse that is undoubtedly medieval: some has an English origin, such as the "Song of Troyelus," an extract from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which derives ultimately from a famous sonnet by Petrarch (no. 88); extracts from Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, and Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*, an adaptation of Christine de Pizan's *L'Epistre au dieu d'amours*. There are also poems by famous Scottish authors: Henryson's "Roben and Makyne," several lyrics by Dunbar, and Douglas's Fourth Prologue (to be discussed later). The contents are extremely varied. Some poems are described by Bannatyne as "Contemptis of lufe," and "ballatis detesting of lufe and lichery." Others give ornate descriptions of a woman's beauty or take the form of "billis," letters of complaint addressed to the poet's mistress. These are very similar in style to the courtly love pieces in R.H. Robbins's anthology, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, and could have been penned at any time between the fifteenth and the early sixteenth century. The collection indicates that the *querelle des dames* was well known in Scotland. It also reveals the continuity in Scottish literary taste, and the long persistence of traditional forms of writing about love. George Bannatyne was prepared to copy such pieces even in the middle of the sixteenth century.

A number of less known Scottish love lyrics, some unpublished, have survived in scattered sources. One is no more than a curiosity: fragmentary and difficult to decipher, it is inscribed upon a slate recently discovered by archaeologists in the main drain of Paisley Abbey.⁸ Another is a quatrain found in a manuscript of Justinian that belonged to a fifteenth-century bishop of Aberdeen, William Elphinstone (Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library, MS 196, fol. 161v):

Allac that euer scho bewte bar	alas / beauty / bore, possessed
That now is went me fra	departed / from
Scho has mad my hert ful sar	unhappy
Allac quhy did sche sa	

Unfortunately the rest of the text is virtually illegible and has so far defeated attempts by various scholars to transcribe it.⁹ Another complaint, "My luf

mornis for me, for me, my luf mornis for me,” is a Scotticized quotation from a very popular late fifteenth-century English song, which was set to music by William Cornish. This snatch of verse occurs on what is now a loose leaf but was originally a folio belonging to a late fifteenth-century composite manuscript (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.1.5, section 8).¹⁰ Other evidence that the song was known in Scotland at a later date is the religious adaptation found in *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*.¹¹ The following mournful piece, previously unpublished, was added to an early printed book (Paris, 1503), owned by Alexander Myln, canon of Dunkeld:

Walkin in wo allone / my cair dois ay increas *grief*
 Sen scho is fra me gone / the well of worthines *since*
 I am left confortles / without plesour in pane
 I am remedeles gif scho cum nocht <agane>.¹² *without remedy / if*

It might also be noted that several Scottish poets had a taste for embedding short, lyrical poems in longer works; these were often highlighted by the use of a different meter. An example is the lover's complaint in five-line stanzas, included in *Lancelot of the Laik*.¹³

One very attractive love lyric illustrates the difficulty of both dating and localizing these wandering texts. The first four lines were copied on the flyleaf of the earliest manuscript of Douglas's *Eneados* (Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS 0.3.12):

My hart is lenit one the land *has remained*
 In luyne with my lade dere. *dwelling / lady*
 My body is one the see saland
 With sorofull hart and seghin so sore. *sighing*

A reference in *The Complaynt of Scotland* shows that this poem was known in Scotland at a later date. But the only complete text is found in a mid-sixteenth century English manuscript miscellany (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 48). One cannot say conclusively where this poem originated, but many features of style and language appear Scottish.¹⁴

The corpus of Scottish romances is small, and much indebted to the traditions of French romance. Indeed several, such as *Lancelot of the Laik*, *Golagros and Gawane*, and *Clariodus*, are based on French originals. An anonymous fifteenth-century translator into Scots of *Les Voeux du paon* makes it clear in his Prologue that love and chivalry are the twin themes of his “romains” [*romance*]: it will treat

Of amourus, armis and of droury, *amours / warfare / love*
 Of knichtheid and of cheualry.¹⁵ (23–4)

John Barbour also refers to his great historical work on Robert Bruce and the War of Independence (composed c. 1375) as a romance (l. 446).¹⁶ But for Barbour romance principally connotes “manheid,” or manly courage. Erotic love is not an important theme in *The Bruce*—it is a work which celebrates love of one’s country, patriotism, freedom, and courageous fighting. It is peopled with bold and valiant men; few women figure in the story, and even fewer, not even Robert Bruce’s queen, are named. Bruce is depicted as king, hero, and inspirational leader of men, not as a lover. Nonetheless love is briefly Barbour’s subject in two interesting passages. The first occurs when Bruce and his followers are on the run and living like outlaws, not far from Aberdeen. In this life of hardship they are joined by Bruce’s brother and the queen,

And other ladyis fayr and farand *handsome*
 Ilkane for luff of thar husband *each one*
 That for leyle luff and leawte *faithful / loyalty*
 Wald partenerys off thar paynys be *sharers*

...

For luff is off sa mekill mycht *great*
 That it all paynys makis lycht,
 And mony tyme mais tender wychtis *makes*
 Of swilk strenthis and swilk mychtis *such*
 That thai may mekill paynys endur. (2. 517–27)

This eulogy is phrased in familiar courtly terms: love ennobles and transforms the character. The love displayed here, however, is that of wives ready to share their husbands’ sufferings. Such virtuous, marital love is revealingly coupled with “leawte,” or loyalty, which for Barbour was one of the prime moral virtues. Earlier in the poem he had given it enormous prominence in his glowing encomium of Sir James Douglas:

Throuh leawte liffis men rychtwisly

...

For quhar it failyeys na vertu
 May be of price na of valu. (1. 365–72)

Love of a very different kind figures in *The Bruce* in the brief story of an amorous English knight called Sir John Webiton (8. 449–99). After his death in battle with Sir James Douglas, the Scots discovered in Webiton’s “coffair” a letter sent to him by an unnamed lady “that he luffyt per drouery.” (*Drouery*, connoting passionate and often illicit love, is a key term in the courtly tradition.) This letter stipulated that the young knight should seize and guard for a year

The aventuris castell off Douglas *hazardous*
 That to kepe sa peralus was. (8. 495–6) *perilous*

Only if he fulfilled this condition, might he ask for “hyr amouris and hyr drouery.” The theme of the knight who must prove his courage and show himself worthy of his mistress is, of course, familiar in medieval romance, and seems to have had occasional parallels in real life.¹⁷ But in the context of *The Bruce* it is most unusual. Barbour’s narration is not unsympathetic, but very laconic, with a bare minimum of detail. No source is known, yet it seems more likely that Barbour abridged the story than that he invented it. More romantic readers in the centuries that followed seem to have felt the need to embroider the narrative in various ways. David Hume of Godscroft followed Barbour, but he expanded the tale slightly in his *History of the House of Douglas*, published posthumously in 1633.¹⁸ A later seventeenth-century manuscript version of Hume’s work added a twelve-line verse expansion of the lady’s letter, which ends:

In all your dangers still thinke on me,
If you proue stout, I true shall be.¹⁹

Later still, Sir Walter Scott took Barbour and Hume as his sources, but totally rewrote the story in his last published novel *Castle Dangerous* (1831).

Blind Hary, author of *The Wallace* (c. 1478), treats many of the same events in the War of Independence as Barbour, but he differs from him in numerous respects, not least in the importance he attaches to love. Matthew P. McDiarmid commented that although Hary was familiar with “the doctrine and phraseology of *amour courtois*,” nevertheless “he had little occasion or inclination to use it in his poem.”²⁰ I would argue, however, that Hary, unlike Barbour, found love important as a means of enhancing and, to some extent, humanizing the character of William Wallace. It was a way of attributing to his hero greater sensibility and psychological complexity than might otherwise be apparent from his single-minded dedication to slaughter of the English, “Our ald Ennemys cummyn of Saxonys blud” (1.7). In this process Hary’s acquaintance with Chaucer’s poetry played some part, though it is never acknowledged in his poem.²¹

Two incidents in *The Wallace*, which are largely Hary’s invention, display Wallace as a lover. The first is a casual affair with an unnamed woman in Perth, whom he visits disguised in “a preistlik [*priestly, clerical*] gown” (4.706). She betrays Wallace to the English, but she later repents and helps him to escape, disguised, once more, in her own gown and head-dress (4.769). Hary’s tone here is light and humorous, and he adopts the Chaucerian narrator’s ploy of ignorance of love:

Rycht unperfyet I am of Venus play. (4.740) *inexperienced / sport*

This episode is depicted as little more than a youthful adventure, with stress on sexual “plesance”; it seems chiefly designed to show Wallace’s

ingenuity in getting out of a tight scrape. The second incident (narrated with considerable detail in books 5 and 6) is more serious, and, ultimately, more tragic. Hary here draws deeply upon the courtly love tradition, mediated through the poetry of Chaucer. The hero first sees his mistress as she is on her way to church and is immediately pierced by "the prent of luff" (5. 606). He has a confidant to whom he expresses his tumultuous feelings concerning this paradoxical "lusty payne" (6. 18); later he reflects that love will distract him from his great mission:

Qwhat is this luff? It is bot gret myschance,
That me wald bryng fra armes wtterly. (6. 33–4)

It is stressed, in this case, that the young woman is a virtuous maiden, of gentle birth. She firmly proclaims: "I wyll no lemman [*mistress*] be / To no man born," and wishes to become Wallace's "rychtwys [*lawful*] wyff" (5. 693–701). This section of *The Wallace*, including the happiness of their subsequent brief marriage, is narrated in a heightened and rhetorical style, many elements of which can be traced to *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Franklin's Tale*, and *The Complaint of Mars*. The later murder of his wife provides a tragic motivation for Wallace's vow of vengeance against all Englishmen.

There is a third scene in which Wallace is depicted not exactly as a lover but as one deeply conversant with the "spech off luff." In this wholly fictitious episode, Wallace and the Scottish army have invaded England as far south as St. Albans, and the queen of Edward I comes to Wallace to sue for peace (8. 1113–1496). Hary is evasive about the queen's feelings toward Wallace, first hinting, then retracting the notion that she might be in love with him (8. 1137–1146). Wallace greets the queen courteously with a kiss, but he is deeply suspicious of her motives. The flirtatious conversation between them has some psychological interest, each speaker's speech masking attempts to probe the other's hidden intentions. Hary thus says of the queen: "Sum-part in sport scho thocht him for to preiff [*probe, test*]" (8. 1400). Wallace later exclaims somewhat bluntly: "In spech of luff suttell 3e Sotheroun [*Southerners, i.e., English*] ar" (8. 1411). This line is revealing: half-critical, half-admiring, it may be interpreted, on the surface, as a criticism of the queen for her wily, cunning language. But underlying it there seems a tribute, possibly unconscious, to the subtlety, or artistry, of English love poetry in the courtly tradition.²²

There is no doubt that the *Roman de la Rose* was known in Scotland during the fourteenth century. A fine illuminated manuscript of the poem was completed in 1323 for Christine de Lindsay, whose family had property in both Scotland and France, and an allusion to "the romance of the rose" occurs in the opening lines of the Scottish *Legends of the Saints*.²³ But it was

not until the fifteenth century that the rich poetic tradition inspired by this allegorical dream vision became widely popular in Scotland. An excellent illustration of Scottish literary taste at this time is provided by a fine manuscript anthology (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden. Arch. B. 24), which was compiled early in the reign of James IV (1488–1513) for the nobleman Henry, Lord Sinclair.²⁴ Sinclair belonged to a book-loving family and was the patron of Gavin Douglas.²⁵ The contents include several of Chaucer's most famous poems, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and *The Legend of Good Women*; there are also other English love poems, such as Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid*, Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*, and Lydgate's *Complaint of the Black Knight*, which was very popular with Scottish readers and commonly known to them as "the Maying of Chaucer."²⁶ The manuscript also contains a number of love-complaints, lamenting the loss or treachery of a lover—there are several anonymous examples, as well as Chaucer's *Complaint of Venus* and *Complaint of Mars*.

This anthology of courtly love poetry was prepared for an aristocratic household, but it illustrates what many Scots, contemporary with Blind Hary, Henryson, Dunbar, and Douglas, were reading in the second half of the fifteenth century. It also illustrates the new ways of writing about love which many Scottish poets themselves had now adopted. They too wrote analytic and reflective poems about the experience of love; they experimented with dream-visions, often combined with some form of allegorical structure; they began to employ a more heightened style, characterized by elevated diction, rhetorical figures, and mythological allusions; and they increasingly used, not the octosyllabic couplets of Barbour, but rhyme royal and other long and elaborate stanza-patterns. The Selden manuscript does not inaugurate this new tradition of Scottish love poetry—which seems to have begun with *The Kingis Quair* very much earlier in the fifteenth century—but it gives clues as to the dominant influences upon the tradition and illustrates its leading characteristics.

The Kingis Quair, the most famous Scottish poem in the Selden manuscript, is thought to have been written by James I of Scotland, probably c. 1424, shortly after his release from English captivity and marriage to Joan Beaufort. It is the finest early Scottish love poem, characterized by passionate yet idealistic feeling. Its tone is also unusually optimistic and happy, as appears from these lines, toward the end, where the poet reflects on his past experience:

And thus befell my blisfull aventure
 In youth of lufe that now from day to day
 Flourith ay newe.²⁷ (1349–51)

The Kingis Quair is technically innovative, being the first poem by a Scot to be written in rhyme royal, but it is also original in a more profound sense

and infuses new life into themes and motifs first employed by Chaucer or Lydgate. The poem contains a famous account of the paradox involved in falling in love:

My wittis all
 Were so ouercom with plesance and delyte,
 Onely throu latting of myn eyen fall, *letting / eyes*
 That sudaynly my hert became hir thrall
 For euer of free wyll. (283–6)

The Kingis Quair has an intricate structure, by no means confined to simple narrative. At its center is an important section consisting of a dream, in which the poet-dreamer is interrogated on the nature of his love and is advised as to his future conduct by three goddesses, Venus, Minerva, and Fortune. Significantly, the book which the poet is reading at the beginning and provides the starting point for his own poem, is Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. This is a thoughtful poem, which grapples with the ethical problems posed by love. Yet the most imaginative passages, which linger vividly in the memory, are those in which the poet first sees his mistress in the garden and describes his response. He sees, for instance, a ruby "birnyng [*burning*] vpon hir quhyte [*white*] throte" (335); he envies the privileged lot of her small dog, "That with his bellis playit on the ground" (369); and he passionately chides the silent nightingale, exhorting it to sing in honor of his lady: "Sluggart, for schame! Lo, here thy goldin hour" (405).²⁸

Another Scottish poem in the Selden Manuscript, *The Quare of Jelusy*, may be briefly mentioned here. It is far less well known than *The Kingis Quair*, and its author is unknown. *The Quare of Jelusy* is not a dream poem, but, in the words of its recent editors, "a framed amatory complaint," employing the so-called eavesdropping framework, familiar from Lydgate's *Complaint of the Black Knight*.²⁹ The narrator overhears a woman bitterly lamenting the suffering inflicted on her by a jealous husband. He tells us no more of this woman's story but takes it as a theme for attacking jealousy in all its manifestations. Some critics have been impressed chiefly by the poem's metrical inventiveness—five different verse-forms are used in its 607 lines. Helen Phillips, however, notes that "the poet writes sharply about the double standard (290–299) and the psychological pathology of this 'maladye' of possessive bullying." She suggests that the poem "may be a Scottish manifestation of a trend seen also in late medieval French works for voicing religious and feminist protest again cruelty to wives."³⁰

Scottish enthusiasm for the allegorical dream tradition is particularly evident in the poems of William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. Dunbar

appreciated the potential of the dream form and put it to many and varied uses, religious and satirical, as well as erotic. *The Thrissill* [*Thistle*] and the *Rois* (no. 52), which celebrates the wedding of James IV and Margaret Tudor in 1503, is less concerned with human love than with the political significance of a dynastic alliance.³¹ Yet it clearly draws upon the courtly love tradition and is much indebted to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* in its conception of the goddess Nature; benign, but authoritative, she presides over an assembly of birds, animals, and flowers and represents the principle of order in the sublunary world. *The Goldyn Targe* (no. 59), one of the first works to be printed in Scotland (1508), combines motifs popular in courtly love poetry for centuries: the dream-framework, the idyllic May morning setting, and an allegorical plot, peopled with mythological figures and personifications, such as Reason, Beauty, Danger, and "Fair Calling [*Welcome*]," the equivalent of French *Bialacoil*, who aids the lover in the *Roman de la Rose*. The theme too is familiar: the fearful dreamer, intrigued by what he sees, falls in love and is betrayed "by a luke [*look*] quhilk I haue boucht [*paid for*] full dere" (135). Later, after an allegorical battle, he succumbs to Beauty and passionately exclaims:

Quhy was thou blyndit, Reson, quhi, allace? *why*
 And gert ane hell my paradice appere, *caused*
 And mercy seme quhare that I fand no grace. (214–216) *found*

This might seem like the summation of the medieval dream tradition, yet the poem departs from convention in many respects: in its extreme brevity, for instance, and in the aureate brilliance of its descriptive style which dazzled early readers, such as Sir David Lyndsay, but has not pleased all modern critics.³² Another poem attributed to Dunbar is "Sen [*since*] that I am a presoneir" (no. 69). This is not technically a dream poem in its present state, though there is an allusion to the poet's waking up (in line 45), which might possibly suggest that it was originally framed within a dream. Nonetheless the allegorical plot concerning a lover who is imprisoned by his lady's beauty is coherently developed. Stylistically, the poem is much plainer than *The Goldyn Targe*, yet no less indebted to the traditions of courtly love. One distinctive feature is the ferocity with which the erotic siege is conducted; another is the role of king Matrimony, who appears toward the end of the poem and restores "gud fame" to the lovers.

Gavin Douglas's *The Palice of Honour* (c. 1503) ought to be mentioned at this point.³³ It too is a dream poem that shows an intimate acquaintance with the themes and topoi of medieval love allegory: among the different processions that pass before the dreamer there is one led by Venus and Cupid (400–597); and the dreamer is charged by a wrathful Venus with

having committed the crime of blasphemy against love (664–70). There are many echoes of Chaucer, in particular of *The House of Fame* and the *Prologue to The Legend of Good Women*. But love, although it figures importantly in this long and complex poem (running to over 2,000 lines), is not the sole or even the main theme. Honor (as the title suggests) and poetry (symbolized by the procession of the Muses) have far more significance for the dreaming poet than Venus.

I will conclude by calling attention to three Scottish examples of a very different tradition of writing about love; moral, serious, usually explicitly Christian, akin to the view embraced by Troilus when he looks down upon the earth from the eighth sphere and despises human love as “worldly vanyte.” All three works were composed at much the same time (between 1492 and 1513), yet in tone and artistry they are markedly different.

The first, which illustrates the approach at its blackest and most misogynistic, is *The Spektakle [Mirror] of Luf*. This anonymous prose treatise is preserved in the Asloan Manuscript and purports to have been translated in 1492 out of an as yet unidentified Latin “buke.” It is couched in the form of a father’s advice to his son, a young amorous knight, to avoid “that foull delectatioun of wemen quhilk thow callis luf,”³⁴ and is crammed with numerous examples of the iniquity of women in their dealings with men. (The antifeminism so evident here is also present in a number of other works composed or copied by Scotsmen in this period, such as *The Buke of the Sevyne Sagis*, also preserved in the Asloan Manuscript, and five Scottish and English verses added to the Gaelic Book of the Dean of Lismore.³⁵) In a brief epilogue the author calls himself a clerk who had served for more than twenty years in “Venus court” but has now been cast out of her service. This passage, with its description of Venus’s parting gifts to the clerk which include “ane pair of beidis [*rosary*] off sabill,” is clearly indebted to the conclusion of Gower’s *Confession Amantis* (cf. 8. 2904). But the author displays none of Gower’s warmth and humanity, and his tone throughout is harsh and invariably negative. Nothing is said about the love of God, and, although the young knight is advised to marry, references to “the haly band of matremoney” are few and perfunctory.

Two of Dunbar’s poems reveal an approach which is both more sophisticated and more spiritual: “In May as that Aurora did vpspring” (no. 24), and “Now cumis aige quhair 3ewth [*youth*] hes bene” (no. 38). Both are deeply religious poems, which reject sexual love as “feynit” and vain, contrasting it with the love directed toward God, the only love which is true and perfect. Both urge man to turn to Christ:

O quhithir wes kythit thair trew lufe or none? *was there / shown*
He is most trew and steadfast paramour. (no. 24. 46–7) *lover*

Is none sa trew a lufe as he
 That for trew lufe of ws did de. (no. 38. 81–2) *die*

Of these two poems, “Now cumis aige,” which has the metrical shape of a carol, is simpler in thought, and slightly repetitive in structure. “In May as that Aurora did vpspring” is far more complex. In form it consists of a debate between two symbolic birds—the merle [*blackbird*] and the nightingale—“Singing of lufe amang the levis small” (114). The idyllic spring setting has many parallels in medieval love poetry, and it might be compared to the scene in *The Kingis Quair* where the birds rejoice in the company of their “makis” and sing happily of love: “In lufis service besy, glad and trewe” (448). But in Dunbar’s poem, although both birds sing with similar sweetness, their “sentens” is contrasted. It is the merle who represents passionate human love, and the nightingale who sings the praise of divine love. Dunbar here draws upon spiritual interpretations of the nightingale, such as that voiced in the thirteenth-century *Philomena* of John Peckham: for Peckham the beautiful but anguished song of the nightingale commemorated Christ’s Passion, and the bird symbolized the virtuous soul filled with love of divine things. Dunbar’s poem has a highly symmetrical pattern. The two speakers are allotted alternate stanzas, and alternating refrains encapsulate their contrasted viewpoints: “A lusty lyfe in lufes service bene” is countered by “All lufe is lost bot vpone God allone.” Such a rigid structure might not seem conducive to the development of a complex argument or the exploration of ideas, yet the dialogue between the birds is lively and pointed. The nightingale’s speeches are based upon the Scriptures and the teachings of St. Augustine. The merle, however, associates herself with the goddess Nature and is represented as a comic sophist:

God bad eik lufe thy nychtbour fro the splene, *commanded/neighbor / heart*
 And quho than ladeis suetar nychtbouris be? (70–71)

Her speeches have a cheeky zest which enlivens the poem. Some of Dunbar’s techniques, notably the bandying of proverbs, recall the debates in Henryson’s *Fables*. This poem, which gives lively expression to sharply contrasted views on love, has been undervalued.³⁶

The question “what is love?” is recurrent in Scottish poetry of this period. Voiced briefly in Hary’s *Wallace*, it occurs as a paradoxical topos in Henryson’s *Orpheus and Eurydice*:

Quhat art thou lufe? How sall I the dyffyne?
 Bitter and suete, cruel and merciable; *merciful*

Plesand to sum, til other playnt and pyne; *lamentation/pain*
 To sum constant, till other variabil;
 Hard is thy law, thi bandis vnbrekeable.³⁷ (401–405) *bonds*

This question also forms the central theme of Douglas's fine Prologue to book 4 of the *Eneados*. Douglas undoubtedly writes from a Christian standpoint, following St. Augustine, in his distinction of love from lust, in his condemnation of "lufe inordinate," and in his praise for a love that is guided by reason and "rewlyt by mesure." But Prologue 4 is not a homiletic tract, and Douglas is far less harsh and simplistic a moralist than the author of *The Spektakle of Luf*. The Prologue is a sustained and passionate meditation on the complexity of love, which recognises its power and ubiquity, its attractiveness and also its dangers. Douglas depicts love as an impersonal force, which manifests itself, for good or evil, not only in sexual love but also in friendship, in animals as well as humans, and in God himself:

Thou art mair forcy than the ded sa fell; *powerful / death*
 Thou plenyst paradyce and thou heryit hell. (41–42) *filled / 'harried'*

The Prologue is characteristic of Douglas in its command of rhetoric. It abounds in such figures of speech as anaphora and oxymoron. Phrases like "ioly wo," "drery gemme [*game, sport*]," and "myrry pane" show his familiarity with the terminology of courtly love, and there are frequent puns and word play, as in: "3our frute is bot onfructuus fantasy" (19). But it is the stream of rhetorical questions, exclamations, and commands which most enlivens his writing and prevents the Prologue from sounding like a mere piece of exposition. Douglas does not address himself to a single reader or audience. By turns, he invokes Venus and Cupid, apostrophizes love itself, castigates lechers, prostitutes, and bawds, and advises young lovers. This is no dry sermon, but an accomplished piece of pulpit oratory.

The Prologue is also characteristic of Douglas in its wealth of literary allusion, to Chaucer, to the Bible, to Virgil, and to St. Augustine. It is this which contributes largely to its variety of tone and width of reference. The brief mention of "the confessioun of morale Ihonne Gower" (213) is particularly noteworthy, since Douglas's views on love have much in common with those of Gower. Douglas exhorts young men and women:

Grund your amouris on charite al new; *ground / base*
 Found yow on resson—quhat nedis mair to preche? (205–6)

The love which he values is "honest" (i.e., chaste and honorable), a lasting emotion distinct from the ephemeral violence of lust, and "rewlyt by

mesure" (125). One should recall Gower's repeated commendation of "honeste" love throughout the *Confessio Amantis*, and his praise of

thilke love which that is
Withinne a mannes herte affermed,
And stant of charite confermed.³⁸(8. 3162–4)

One might also compare Douglas's chime on "Grund" and "Found" with the similar rhymes in Gower's conclusion to the tale of Apollonius of Tyre:

Lo, what it is to be wel grounded:
For he hath ferst his love founded
Honestliche as forto wedde,
Honestliche his love he spedde. (8. 1993–6)

All readers familiar with the *Aeneid* will realize the aptness of discussing love and desire in the Prologue to book 4, which narrates the story of Dido's love and death. Not all modern critics, however, like what they find in this Prologue. James Simpson, for instance, recently complained of Douglas's "incapacity, or refusal, to register sympathy for Dido"; even more curiously, he suggests that the translation as a whole was driven by "a need to victimize women."³⁹ I would argue, on the contrary, that what drove Douglas, above all, was his passionate admiration for Virgil as a poet, and his respect for the style and structure of the *Aeneid*. Today there seems little interest in such esthetic values, and their novelty and originality in Douglas's own time are underrated. Douglas poured scorn on Caxton's version of the *Aeneid*, because he "pervertit" its proportions, in giving undue prominence to the story of Dido:

So that the ferd buke of Eneadon, *fourth / Aeneid*
Twichand the lufe and ded of Dido queyn, *concerning / death*
The twa part of his volume doith conteyn, *half / occupy*
That in the text of Virgill, trastis me,
The twelt part scars contenys, as ye may se. (I Prol. 168–72) *twelfth*

In Prologue 4, as in his translation of book 4, Douglas's attitude to Dido does not seem to me to differ profoundly from that of Virgil. He refuses to see her through the eyes of Chaucer (in "The Legend of Dido"), or those of Ovid (in *Heroides* VII). Douglas's thoughts about Dido clearly underlie the whole of Prologue 4, but they are only voiced explicitly in the final section (lines 215–270). There he interprets her death as a "tragedy," caused by the working within her of blind love's "inordinate desyre" and also by the perversity of fate, or "frawart destine," (262) in the shape of Aeneas and the malignity of the gods. He writes eloquently of the

magnitude of Dido's fall from her former renown—"Danter of Affryk, queyn foundar of Cartage" (226) and "flour and lamp of Tyre" (252). Douglas's response to Dido is far from simple; it is compassionate as well as critical.

It is fitting to end with a brief note on Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, one of the most powerful and most original of Scottish poems. This is not the place, however, to add to the ever-growing mountain of critical comment on that poem.⁴⁰ It is more appropriate to note its central position within the traditions of Scottish medieval love poetry, and its interesting affinities with some of the works discussed previously. What Henryson says of Chaucer, for instance, is highly characteristic of the Scottish response. He writes as warmly and admiringly of "worthie Chaucer glorious," (41) as Dunbar, yet (like Douglas) is prepared to challenge him: "Quha wait [*who knows*] gif all that Chauceir wrait [*wrote*] was trew?" (64). Structurally, *The Testament of Cresseid*, has some similarity to *The Kingis Quair*. Henryson employs the "reading of a book" motif, but he complicates it by mentioning not only his major source and stimulus, *Troilus and Criseyde*, but also a second and possibly imaginary "quair [*book*]" (61). Henryson, like James I, does not use the dream merely as a frame for his poem but places it at the very center of the narrative. But the planetary gods in *Cresseid*'s nightmarish vision, unlike the benign figures of *The Kingis Quair*, inspire fear and terror. In other respects *The Testament of Cresseid* looks forward, to the next generation of Scottish poets. The dreamer in Douglas's *Palice of Honour* is charged with *Cresseid*'s crime, blaspheming Cupid and Venus; he too is threatened with savage punishment, but spared through the intercession of the Muses. Henryson's conception of Venus closely resembles that of Douglas and differs from the "blisfull" goddess and "planet merciable [*merciful*]" (531, 688) depicted in *The Kingis Quair*. Henryson's Venus, who presides over "fleschelic paramour [*love*]" (232), has many of the attributes of the goddess Fortune; as in *The Palice of Honour* (483–5), she is "unstabil and full of variance" (218–38). In its moral seriousness *The Testament of Cresseid* is particularly close to Douglas's Prologue 4. *Cresseid*'s story, like Dido's, is termed a "tragedie" (4), and both poets see their stories as exemplary, offering warnings to the "worthie wemen" or "lustie ladeis" who might read them. Yet Henryson, like Douglas, tempers harshness with pity; his apostrophe to "fair Creisseid, the flour and A per se / Of Troy and Grece" (78–9) anticipates the tone of Douglas's apostrophe to Dido. *The Testament of Cresseid* was by far the most influential of these Scottish love poems. In Scotland it was echoed and imitated not only by Douglas but by many later poets; in England, as is well known, it was included in Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer, and it thus entered the English literary tradition, profoundly altering the image of *Criseyde* throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Notes

1. Janet M. Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), p. xvi.
2. See *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Dickson, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), pp. 114 and 184. More generally, see *Ballatis of Luve*, ed. John MacQueen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), pp. xi–xiv.
3. See *The Complaynt of Scotland*, ed. A.M. Stewart (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 1979), pp. 49–54.
4. References are to Gregory Kratzmann's useful edition of the poem in *Colkelbie Sow and the Talis of the Fyve Bestes* (New York: Garland, 1983).
5. For fuller information, see *The Early English Carols*, ed. Richard Leighton Greene, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), no. 459.
6. References are to Gavin Douglas, *Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse*, ed. David F.C. Coldwell, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1957–1964).
7. For a facsimile of the manuscript, see *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, intro. Denton Fox and William A. Ringler (London: Scolar Press, 1980); this contains an informative list of the contents. For a transcript of the love poems, see *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, ed. William Tod Ritchie, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1928–1934), 3:240–4.116.
8. See Graham Caie, "The Inscribed Paisley Slates," in *The Monastery and Abbey of Paisley*, ed. John Malden (Glasgow: Renfrewshire Local History Forum, 2000), pp. 199–203.
9. See N.R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969–1983), 2:13.
10. For discussion, see John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 393–394; and Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), pp. 89–90.
11. See *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, ed. A.F. Mitchell (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1897), pp. 140–141.
12. This occurs on folio 1 of the second part of *Corpus Iuris canonici . . . compilatio* (Paris, 1503), owned by the National Library of Scotland (shelf mark: RB. M. 76).
13. See *Lancelot of the Laik*, ed. Margaret Muriel Gray (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1912), lines 968–718.
14. For a full account, see Priscilla Bawcutt, "A Song from *The Complaynt of Scotland*: 'My Hart is Leiuit on the Land,' " *Notes and Queries* 247.2 (2002): 193–197.
15. See A.S.G. Edwards, "Contextualising Middle Scots Romance," in *A Palace in the Wild: Essays on Vernacular Culture and Humanism in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen, A.A. MacDonald, and S.L. Mapstone (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), pp. 61–73; and *The Buik of*

- Alexander*, ed. R.L. Graeme Ritchie, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1921–1929), 2:107.
16. Citations are from John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. A.A.M. Duncan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997).
 17. Cf. Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 116–117, 212–213.
 18. See David Hume of Godscroft, *The History of the House of Douglas*, ed. David Reid, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1996), 1:83–85, and 2: 483–484.
 19. On the Hamilton Palace Manuscript, see Reid, *History*, 1. xxx.
 20. *Hary's Wallace*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1968), 1: xxxviii.
 21. Cf. Vernon Harward, "Hary's Wallace and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 10 (1972): 48–50; and Priscilla Bawcutt, "English Books and Scottish Readers," *Review of Scottish Culture* 14 (2001–2002): 6 [1–12].
 22. On the historiographical tradition behind both *The Bruce* and *The Wallace*, see R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland: Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).
 23. See Priscilla Bawcutt, "'My bright buke': Women and their Books in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), p. 27 [17–34]; and *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. W.M. Metcalfe, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1896), 1:1 (line 5).
 24. See *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Kingis Quair: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24*, intro. Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997).
 25. Cf. Priscilla Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976), pp. 47 and 92–93.
 26. Cf. Bawcutt, "English Books," 7–8.
 27. References are to James I of Scotland, *The Kingis Quair*, ed. John Norton-Smith (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981).
 28. For further discussion, see Lois A. Ebin, "Boethius, Chaucer, and *The Kingis Quair*," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974): 321–341; Julia Boffey, "Chaucerian Prisoners: The Context of *The Kingis Quair*," in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King's College, London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), pp. 84–102; and Sally Mapstone, "Kingship and the *Kingis Quair*," in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 51–69.
 29. See *The Quare of Jelusy*, ed. John Norton-Smith and I. Pravda (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1976), p. 7.
 30. See Helen Phillips, "Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry," in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, ed. Cooper and Mapstone, p. 95 [71–97].

31. References are to *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2 vols. (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998).
32. On Dunbar's style, see Priscilla Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 347–382.
33. The poem is included in *The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 2003). See Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas*, pp. 47–68.
34. See *The Asloan Manuscript*, ed. William A. Craigie, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1923–1925), 1:273 [271–298]. On this important literary miscellany, see Ian C. Cunningham, "The Asloan Manuscript," in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture*, ed. A.A. MacDonald et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 107–135.
35. See *The Buke of the Sevyne Sagis*, ed. Catherine van Buuren (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1982); and the description of National Library of Scotland, MS Adv. 71.1.37 in the typescript catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts.
36. For fuller discussion, see Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, pp. 315–322.
37. References are to Robert Henryson, *The Poems*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
38. References are to John Gower, *The Complete Works*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902).
39. Cf. James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 2: 1350–1547. *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 91–92.
40. For a useful select bibliography, see Douglas Gray, "Robert Henryson," in *Authors of the Middle Ages: English Writers of the Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 9: 155–172.

INDEX

Note: This is essentially an index of names, mainly of places, people, and works of literature. It does not include the names of characters in literary texts, except in the case of Chaucer where individual stories in the *Canterbury Tales* are identified by their tellers. It includes the names of scholars mentioned in the main text of the essays, but not those referred to only in the footnotes. The arrangement of the items is alphabetical, as generally is the arrangement within items, except in the case of the Bible (where the arrangement follows the Authorised Version order of the books) and in the case of Chaucer (where the arrangement of works follows that of the standard edition referred to). In the entry on “manuscripts” the arrangement is initially by location. There are several general headings, such as “mythological figures” and “saints” which are then subdivided alphabetically.

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